

Towards a Phenomenological Axiology

Discovering What Matters

Roberta De Monticelli

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> The essential feature of a thought is that it can be true or false: it embodies a condition that the world either satisfies or fails to satisfy. This conception has its home in a view of the world as objective and independent of our experience and of our thinking: a thought must be true or false independently of our judgment. It is just this feature of thoughts which makes our grasp of them an indispensable ingredient of our awareness of the world: it is this which, according to Frege in *Der Gedanke*, opens up the external world to us.

Sir Michael Dummett (1925–2011), the author of these words, taken from the beginning of his Introduction to my first published book (Dummett 1982, VII), is the first person that occurs to my mind when I think of the encounters that laid the foundations on which the present book still rests. The second is Jeanne Hersch (1910–2000), who taught Modern and Contemporary Philosophy in Geneva before I had the honor and the chance to succeed her (and Manfred Frank) to that chair in 1989. I often quoted in my courses what she used to call "the paradox of history":

> Without resort to some absolute value, history loses its meaning, but nothing produces worse ravages in history than resorting to absolute values. (Hersch 1956)

These quotes from two masters of twentieth-century philosophy, whose student I was lucky enough to have been at different ages in different places—Oxford and Geneva—span the "space of reasons" of this book and back up its main question. Consider our most important thoughts—those about nobility and baseness, might and right, about what makes a life worth living and what detracts from its dignity, about beauty or justice, clarity and exactness, about the superiority of democracy to totalitarian government. Or even more modest issues, such as the accuracy of a homework, the grace of a drawing, the sweetness of a friend: might it be possible that these thoughts do not enjoy "the essential feature of a thought," that they cannot be true or false, failing to have truth conditions? Might it be possible that they are not thoughts after all—hence incapable of being discussed, argued for, verified, rejected, or known to be true or false? This book takes this question very seriously and tries to outline the theoretical frame within which one can reject this skeptical doubt: namely, the frame of a cognitivist theory of values, or axiology. A task that cannot be performed without going through most of the skeptical arguments put forward in the course of the twentieth century, and evoking some at least of the tragic experiences hinted at in the second quote.

The two philosophers to whose memory I want to dedicate this work, Sir Michael Dummett and Jeanne Hersch, never met. Their views are rooted, respectively, in the analytical and in the continental traditions, of which each one of them represents the best flourishing. They did not avail themselves of the phenomenological research method, although none of them ignored it: however, I owe to their passion for truth, their sense of the ethical and logical responsibility a philosopher takes in the use of language, and their search for the sources of evidence in philosophy, the very inspiration to go beyond them—by way of phenomenological philosophy. This book is entirely based on that method and draws on a large phenomenological literature, without being exegetical or historical in character.

In Geneva, and later in Milan, where the phenomenological tradition had been dominant since the 1960s, I taught the classics of the so called "realist" phenomenology. All of them have both axiology and the epistemology of value judgments, as well as value experience, at the heart of

their work. I also encouraged translations from these classics into Italian; the philological and exegetical work displayed to this purpose is on the background of my research work, and for that I have inexhaustible debts of gratitude toward the younger colleagues who took this difficult task upon themselves: first and foremost Roberta Guccinelli, the impeccable Italian translator and commentator on Scheler's *Formalismus* in the bilingual annotated Bompiani edition of 2013; as well as Francesca De Vecchi (*Selections from Stein, Hildebrand, Geiger, Pfaender*) and Giuseppe Di Salvatore (*Jean Héring*).

Strangely enough, the flourishing ethical and metaethical research projects that issued from the analytic tradition ignored (and still ignore) that phenomenological legacy—and most phenomenology scholars reciprocate this neglect. One ought to be all the more grateful to Dan Zahavi and his Center for Subjectivity Research in Copenhagen for their work in reducing the linguistic and methodological divide between the two traditions, which has caused so many misunderstandings on both sides. The Research Center PERSONA at San Raffaele University, Milan, and its journal, *Phenomenology and Mind*, were born out of an analogous and parallel effort to bring contemporary phenomenology up to the standard of analytical rigor. We tried to do for axiology and the philosophy of personhood what the Center for Subjectivity Research was doing for philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences—namely, opening up for them the way to a better understanding of contemporary phenomenology. On the occasion of an invited lecture to the Copenhagen Summer School (2015) I presented the first draft of this bottom-up phenomenological axiology and had the pleasure to have it discussed, among others, by Dan Zahavi, Soeren Overgaard, Ingrid Vendrell-Ferran, and several younger researchers or students.

My research would have been impossible without the support and collaboration of my younger colleagues that manage both the PERSONA workshops and the journal: Francesca De Vecchi and Francesca Forlè. Countless discussions about shared research projects, including this one on axiology, that I had with them as well as with our students, are among the most precious stimuli I had to bring about this project. I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to San Raffaele University for allowing

me to enjoy privileged periods of research and to all the colleagues that made them possible.

In trying to fill the gap between the analytical and the phenomenological traditions, I had the privilege of discussing the project with so many researchers that I must apologize for not mentioning everybody. This project was born as the English version of a book I published in Italian (*Al di qua del bene e del male. Per una teoria dei valori*. Turin: Einaudi 2015). However, this anti-Nietzschean work (literally, "This Side of Good and Evil": such was the hint for translation I had from Martha Nussbaum, whom I thank for appreciating this attempt) grew into a new and richer book as I presented parts of it to a more international audience. This mainly happened during two research fellowships I was awarded, by the Italian Academy at Columbia University (2016–2017) and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Paris (2019–2020). I would like to acknowledge gratefully all the colleagues who shared the exciting seminars at the Italian Academy, starting from the House's hosts, its Director David Freedberg, and its Executive Director Barbara Faedda. I very much profited from discussions with Manfred Posani-Loewenstein, Frédérique de Vignemont, Beatrice de Gelder, Andrea Polonioli, Jesse Prinz, David Rosenthal, Bertrand Harcourt, and Eugene Kelly. I am particularly grateful to Achille Varzi for hosting and discussing part of my final chapter in his Columbia University seminar on Metaphysics and Nadia Urbinati for allowing me to present my chapter on the cynical consciousness in her seminar on Political Philosophy. I was able to present my take on the EU axiological project to a knowledgeable audience thanks to Francois Carrel-Billiard, Associate Director of the European Institute at Columbia University. On previous and subsequent occasions, during the meetings of the Max Scheler Society of North America (MSSNA), the North American Society for Early Phenomenology (NASEP), and the Max Scheler Gesellschaf, I was able to present most of the ideas worked out in this book, enjoying comments and criticisms from Zachary Davis, Olivier Agard, Joachim Fischer, Susan Gottloeber, Guido Cusinato, Evrim Kuti, and Matthias Schlossberger. New suggestions about a specifically Husserlian approach to ethics came from John Drummond and Susi Ferrarello. I want to thank Xiaogang Yang and Husserl scholar Ni Liangkang for the challenging opportunity I was offered to confront my theory of axiological

pluralism with recent developments in Chinese phenomenology, during an international conference on Scheler and Asiatic Thought at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, in the fall semester of 2017. I also wish to express to the Director of the Husserl Archive in Leuven, Julia Jansen, my deep gratitude for the access she allowed me to the then not yet published volume 43 of the series Husserliana, *Studien zur Struktur der Bewusstsein* (eds. Ulrich Melle and Thomas Vongehr), in particular Teilband III, *Wert und Gefühl*, for a series of lectures on axiology I gave at KU Leuven during the fall semester of 2018. There I learnt much from Julia, Emanuele Caminada, Stefano Micali, Thomas Vongehr, and many younger researchers. Finally, the academic year 2019–2020, that I spent in Paris in the fascinating research community of the IAS at the Hôtel de Lauzun on the Ile Saint Louis, despite the pandemics that locked down Paris from the beginning of the spring, was as rich with online encounters and discussions as any other time of my research. I wish to thank my hosts at the House, who painstakingly discussed my project: Director Saadi Lahlou and Scientific Director Simon Luck, as well as the Director of the Brain, Culture and Society Program, Gretty Mirdal, for introducing me to brain scientists such as Patrick Haggard and Salvatore Aglioti, and for supporting the workshops I organized online, during which I received extremely useful suggestions on most of the theoretical implications of Chapter 6 from Roberto Casati, Jerôme Dokič, Gloria Origgi, Nathalie Heinich, Alessandro Salice (Cork), Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl (Graz), Sara Heinämaa (Jyväskylä), and Thomas Szanto (Copenhagen). A hearty thanks to Erik Norman Dzwiza-Ohlsen (Cologne) for a thorough discussion of my take on pluralism versus relativism. Anna Marmodoro hosted a presentation of the metaphysical background of my whole project in her seminar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Her comments and her friendly hospitality (just before the lockdown) there, where it all had begun at the time of my PhD study with Dummett, are among the happiest memories of the time I spent working on this project.

The hard job the anonymous referees made to suggest improvements to this project has proved so useful that I really would like to thank them–even the most severe among them–quite heartily, as well as the editors and staff of Palgrave Macmillan. Among the most severe but not anonymous reviewers, one deserves special gratitude for his invaluable help, his patience, and countless discussions: my partner, Giacomo Costa.

Last but not least, this work would have not seen the light of day without the precious editing and bibliographical work of Kevin Bowring, philosopher, theologian and friend: whose assistance and insightful advice made the final result not only a more readable but also a better philosophy book.

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Contents



1

Introduction

This book attempts to open up a path toward a phenomenological theory of values, or axiology (from the ancient Greek "axios", worthy). By drawing on everyday experience, and dissociating the notion of value from that of tradition, it shows how emotional sensibility can be integrated into practical reason.

The fragility of democracy and the public irrelevance of the ideal principles which support it have never been more apparent in current everyday political discourse, all over the world. The project of this book was prompted by the persuasion that this fragility, and this irrelevance, largely depend on the inability of modern philosophy to overcome the well-entrenched skepticism about the power of practical reason. The book begins with a phenomenology of cynical consciousness, continues with a survey of still influential theories of value rooted in twentieth-century philosophy, and finally offers an outline of a bottom-up axiology that revives the anti-skeptical legacy of phenomenology, without ignoring the standards set by contemporary metaethics.

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1 Axiology in the Pandemic

This book was written before the COVID-19 pandemic made us dramatically aware of the devastating lack of vision, forecasting, and capacity for international cooperation on the part of most governments, despite the sudden apparent shrinkage of the world under the global crisis that made the inhabitants of the most remote corners of the earth into our neighbors. Many of us, I suspect, felt that a time of silence and retirement, a time of complete renewal of our habitual ways of thought and research, a time of humility and learning was required in the face of the enormous ignorance we had shown vis-à-vis the world machinery and its precarious or maybe miraculous functioning: the smallest imaginable grain of sands in its gears had been sufficient to stop it and lock down nations for months, without anybody having—apparently—been able to predict the disaster, or even to help avoid the number of casualties and future poverty.

Yet I also felt, however confusedly, that the long-term project of research into the cognitive foundations of a theory of values and value experience provisionally issued in this book had stemmed from a question that the current circumstances had only made more pressing, but that had been there all the time, almost as a thread running through it. This became suddenly clear to me while reading in *The New York Review of Books* an article by the American novelist Marilynne Robinson on "the grounds and opportunity to do some very basic thinking" during the time of the pandemic. I was struck by an image of the (more or less) ancient, lofty buildings of most European and some North American universities:

> Historically, we have offered our young—though never enough of them—exposure to high thought and great art, along with chemistry and engineering. There is an opulence in all this that has no equivalent in the world. What were those earlier generations thinking when they built our great city-states of research and learning? All those arches and spires induce the belief in undergraduates that they have a dignified place in human history.[1]

[1] Robinson 2020, p. 9.

Where have all those arches and spires gone, in the image of the world dominating the minds of those who make the relevant decisions, in all fields, shaping our present and future? What would have been the place of "high thought" in upcoming "human history"? That was my question too! Chemistry and engineering, and above all, in the present predicament, the medical sciences have proven indispensable in counteracting the ineptitude of governments in the face of the pandemic; truth and knowledge proved more and more necessary to the government of our complex societies; but if anything had become evident, it was that factual knowledge was by no means sufficient. *Axiological competence* has been blatantly missing. The more the place of scientific-technical competences within political institutions was gaining momentum, the more attention should have been paid to the composition of different values, which should be a major task of democratic governance. For example, a key principle of democracy requires transparency, clarity, and consistency in the information a government owes to the public, concerning the reasons why a given measure should be suggested or imposed, in view of the public interest. This principle has been significantly neglected by several governments in Europe, where the public have been regarded much more as a mass of irresponsible, spoiled children who will suffer no rules, than as autonomous rational agents, whose consent must be gained by good reasons. Not to mention those governments in the world that violated their condition of legitimacy, that is protecting the lives of their citizens. Moreover: despite being acceptable in a time of crisis, as by definition temporary, a temporally undefined reversal of the priority relationship of personal and civic values over vital values (among which health is the most basic) would not have been acceptable as a choice withdrawn from the sovereignty of citizens. By "priority," I mean that—according to constitutional common sense—the defense of public health is indeed a necessary condition for the flourishing of individual persons in peace and prosperity to be possible, but certainly not a sufficient condition: it is a means, rather than an end. So is the good functioning of the economy, welfare, and even, in times of global crisis, international cooperation.

Even before this crisis, the starting point of my questioning was a fact that everyone can observe: the public irrelevance and the virtual disappearance from public debates of the philosophical thought rooted in the

traditions of humanism and the Enlightenment that had inspired all the battles for liberty and justice in the modern world, and that, after the Second World War, had shaped the normative re-establishment of some European states and the organisms of the international community. The "glorious thirty" post-war years had set out great normative documents and institutions (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the new Constitutions of the re-founded European states, the European Union and—a bit later—its charter of rights), realizing what I call a "normative embodiment of practical reason," i.e., the most amazing, albeit partial and imperfect, actualization of the ethical legacy of ancient and modern philosophy. The world that issued from the bankruptcy of practical reason in the first half of the twentieth century had ended up incarnating in its institutions—albeit partially—the "high thought" of past centuries, or their better, enlightened heritage. The world, for a precious moment, appeared to have disdained all other sorts of "roots" but for roots of paper and thought: "ideal" roots. The discussion of this "injection of ideality" into the very foundations of politics, and of the ways in which, in the meantime, paradoxically, philosophy had ceased to feed and revive its institutional children, is reviewed in Chap. 3. For much was still in need of clarification, firstly concerning this "ideality." The great ideas that had edified the modern mind were involved. Liberty, reason, and *humanitas*—the latter idea containing the sumptuous reconciliation between earth and heaven, Greek myths and Christian grace in Florentine Platonism, and given munificent form in Raphael's *Stanze*—had found an early home in the spirit of the Italian Renaissance, just before the wars between Germany and France for European supremacy, with the suicidal contribution of Italian local powers putting an end to Italian flourishing, as well as and political freedom. This is why this book has its opening in the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence—the symbolic home for both the first ascent and the first fall of modernity and its ideals.

Ideas, ideals, ideality: apparently vague terms, whose meaning is as lofty and fading as those "arches and spires" of the ancient Universitas Studiorum in the minds of the world's present governances. These words needed clarification—even more, their meaning had to be revived in the only way meanings can acquire a new life: by filling empty concepts with fresh intuitions. The connections of their meanings, too, had to be

explained, as well as the connections with related terms, even more equivocal and confusing: idealism and ideology.

There I felt there was a task possibly assigned to me. Why was there such a mist around these words? Furthermore, couldn't this mist be a cause of the progressive fading away from public life that philosophy with all its arches and spires—the *a priori* principles of practical reason—had paradoxically undergone, after inspiring all the men and women that over about two centuries—the "age of rights"—had created the institutions of modern democracy? Had this mist not ended up discrediting philosophy, and driving it out of the sphere of practical thought—the thought that directs our decisions and choices—and from public debate?

If such were even in part the case, then dispelling the mist was mandatory. But how should one proceed?

2 Toward a Phenomenological Axiology

One thing seemed clear: not much help would come from the academic disciplines collected under the label "value theory."[2] In this section I will suggest some reasons for this mistrust.

Most contemporary research in this field falls under the very specialized domain called metaethics, which addresses the status of evaluative propositions and is usually contrasted with normative ethics as a second-order discourse on value. In fact, as we shall see, the whole metaethical debate originates at the beginning of the last century at the crossroads of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (2004) and the early philosophy of language and logics. While normative ethics presents itself as a "substantive" inquiry into moral value, giving rise to competing ethical theories (such as eudemonistic, deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics), metaethics, born as an inquiry into the logic and semantics of evaluative and normative sentences, evolves into a very sophisticated debate about the status of value properties, sometimes presenting itself as the "ontology" of values and value properties because it questions and argues for or against their existence.

[2] Hirose and Olson 2015, p. 4.

Here, as we shall see, the whole debate turns around a dilemma, which calls the very *existence* of values into radical doubt. On the one hand, value properties are considered real, "natural" properties instantiated by things and facts of this world; but in this case they seem to lose their normativity (this is a paraphrase of Moore's famous naturalistic fallacy argument). On the other hand, their normativity is to be safeguarded, for it *defines* them as value properties; in this case, however, value properties must inhabit another world, an ideal one, a kind of Platonic realm where things are just as they ought to be and not as they are in "the real world."[3]

Now if this dilemma has no solution, we are left with two equally uncomfortable options: either one may become a dualist, whose life is radically split into two incommunicable worlds, that of ideality and that of reality; or one may become a value nihilist, for values cannot *possibly* inhabit the actual world. In either case, one will become a *skeptic* in the matter of value judgments, for there will be no truth conditions that make statements about seemingly value-laden facts, such as burnt cathedrals or slaughters, true or false, and the search for evidence to justify any such value judgment will be utterly in vain.

Of course, there has been no shortage of increasingly sophisticated "solutions" to this dilemma that purport to avoid both dualism and nihilism. A detailed discussion of these contemporary approaches would exceed the scope of this book.[4] However, I do provide an outline of the main positions in contemporary metaethics, or at least of their rationale, at the beginning of the sixth and last chapter of this book, the *pars construens* of it, the one which should lead us "towards a phenomenological axiology." But why does my outline of a theory of values, alternate to the existing ones, come so late in the book?

It actually comes after four more chapters devoted, respectively, to untutored forms of axiological skepticism (Chaps. 2 and 3) and the learned, highly differentiated forms of it that have shaped current

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[3] This is the famous "Queerness Argument," put forward by Mackie (1977), and taken into account, whether to endorse it or to reject it, by most metaethicists: in fact, with Moore (2004), Mackie (1977) seems to have been one of the two main landmarks in the landscape of metaethics.

[4] For a multifaceted description of current issues in contemporary metaethics, and a good introduction to it, see Kirchin 2012.

opinion in the public sphere during the last century and up to the present (Chaps. 4 and 5).

Chapters 2 and 3 invite readers to exercise the phenomenological method even before it is theorized: they provide examples of how culture, institutions, legal norms—in short, all the real structures of civilization—are emptied of meaning and efficacy whenever *the lived experiences of value and disvalue* that motivated the erection of those structures fades away. They outline descriptions of the ways in which what I called "the erosion of ideality" is bound with local or global failures in the making of the autonomous, critical, and sensible identity of persons: they display the phenomenology of what I call "cynical consciousness" and investigate its genesis. In short, they display concrete examples of the relation between "reality" and "ideality," as it is lived and brought to a more or less clear consciousness in the everyday life of our times. This way of proceeding is bound up with my main source of perplexity concerning academic metaethics: how can one possibly argue for or against the existence of values—or the objectivity of value judgments—before any inquiry is made into *what it is* that we call "values" or "value properties," and *how* we become aware of such things? Existential claims are empty and unverifiable in the absence of any notion of *what* is claimed to exist (or not). Metaethicists of all schools hit upon a crucial philosophical problem when, on the basis of Hume's value/facts dichotomy and of Moore's naturalistic fallacy argument, they focus on a fundamental opposition between the ideal and the real. But they never undertake the first step necessary for elucidating the problem: an analysis of the tension between ideality and reality *as it is given to us in our experience of value*. As a consequence, the tension between reality and ideality is always presented in such a way that any purported solution *explains it away*, before allowing us to realize that we experience value properties not only as "opposed," but also as *entangled* with real properties. Otherwise, slaughters and burnt cathedrals would not exist.

Philosophy has always registered and, in most cases, explained the tension between the ideal and the real away, by endorsing either dualism or a reduction to "reality." The first response is exemplified by Plato's characterization of the Good as "beyond substance" (*Republic* 509b–c), long before Hume's dichotomy of facts and values and the naturalistic fallacy

that Moore cautions against. Even Kant's purely deontological foundation of ethics is best understood as a similar response to that lived opposition—and a very dualistic one. Spinoza and Nietzsche—who converge in this respect, no matter how different their world views may be in most others—would be the prime examples of the reductive approach.

More examples would confirm that, before being more recently conceptualized as the dilemma of metaethics, the opposition between the real and the ideal had been taken care of by philosophers, mostly in ways that are closer to ordinary experience than the average metaethical discussion. A phenomenological approach teaches us that this lived tension tells us something about the very nature of values. Of course, it sheds light on value experience as well.

Indeed, what would be the point of philosophical research that did not help us to clarify our mental life, our beliefs and sentiments, our desires and intentions, our emotions? Here, by "clarifying," I mean making sense of them, but also, in a more Socratic vein, submitting them to critical examination and the demand for justification. Axiology is called upon to make sense of our whole emotional life and to question it about its appropriateness. A phenomenology of value experience will describe the tension between the real and the ideal as it is lived: in pain, sadness, bewilderment, discouragement, indignation, and perhaps even guilt or shame at things *not* being as they *ought to* be. Sometimes, it is true, this very opposition between *how things actually are* and how they *ought to be* is experienced in admiration and joy, enthusiasm and gratitude, as at least partially and provisionally overcome, for example, in what we call "perfection" in real things, when they are very good tokens of their types, or excellent exemplars of what they should be "ideally": performances and works, artifacts and pieces of nature, animals, plants, crystals. Rarely, if ever, do "ideal" republics get to become actual ones. And yet we know that values are not just experienced as opposed to reality, but also as *entangled* with it, constitutive of the concrete goods we enjoy. Think of that pervasive quality of our life that we call health—and what it is like to be without it.

A phenomenological approach suggests that the study of things *as they are experienced* teaches us a lot about the very nature of the things themselves. This seems especially true of values. Think of mourning. There is

something in what makes a person precious that is only—and bitterly—"realized" when the person is no longer there. There is a quality, a texture of good health, that only becomes felt when recovering from illness. Positive values are never so vividly given as when we realize that they are no longer actualized or when the corresponding goods are missing, which usually (but not necessarily) means that the corresponding negative values are realized in their place. Through the experience of real injustice, we come to see what justice is; similarly, we discover that an ideal society is what most actual societies are *not*.

Let us sum up. Contemporary metaethics explains away the whole tension between "is" and "ought" as it is lived in value experience: but it is only in value experience that this tension, present both as opposition and as entanglement, has a defining sense for what we call values. This lived tension is what Husserl called their *Seinssinn*, their mode of being. Oughtness, or normativity, is an essential feature of a value: justice is what a society ought to realize in some measure, and what most do not; health is what a vital being should be given to live well. An ideal republic is a model of a just society.

Not only contemporary metaethics, but modernity's entire framework of practical reason fails to deal with this latter issue. Phenomenological axiology—but also phenomenological philosophy itself—is essentially born to answer it insofar as it is a theory of *eide* or ideas. Or so it can be argued, as I will, as far as values are concerned, in the theoretical *pars construens* of this book, after we have become familiar with some crucial aspects of the valuing consciousness here and now, in the lifeworld and its present state.[5]

3 Reasons for Skepticism

As soon as I began to wonder how the very notion of ideality had become so nebulous, I noticed that, when it comes to values, there is at least one feature common to everyday conversations and academic debates: an astounding *silence* about what seems to be our everyday value experience.

[5] De Monticelli 2022 (forthcoming).

What is overlooked is our actual experience of the world, what Husserl called the *lifeworld*: the world of our acting and suffering, manipulating things and encountering people, making discoveries, being surprised or upset by events, admiring persons and things, falling in love or feeling indignation and disgust, making decisions, promises, contracts, political choices, experiencing the breathtaking beauty of so many places on earth, the unbearable injustice still haunting societies even in the most advanced democracies, their deserts of poverty and the disasters of war at their borders, the ruin and vicious destruction of past heritage all over, and so on. At each moment of the day we have to do with goods and ills of all sizes and ranks: the world of everyday experience is filled with things—facts, actions, events, and situations—exhibiting positive and negative *value qualities*.

How does it happen that everyday language has hardly retained this modest meaning of the word "values," which the classics of phenomenological axiology took up during the first decades of the last century with the purpose of enlightening everyday experience?[6] However, the word "values" is morphologically not so different from the word "colors." Colors, as well, are apparent qualities instantiated in things, space, and time. But they are also *types* or ideal objects, which set bounds to the chromatic variations of things: blue does not become yellow if you paint a blue chair yellow.

Yet this modest meaning has not been currently retained in everyday English (nor in French, German, or Italian). The word "values"—in its plural form—currently raises suspicion in public and private conversations. We tend to associate it with conservative-authoritarian ideologies. Or, at least, we tend to assume that values are what are inherited from the past, that they are thus in essence "traditional." Many who dislike this word tend to associate it with fundamental, non-negotiable principles defining a cultural identity, a religious allegiance, or a political faith. But

[6] Among these classics, the following have been a permanent source of inspiration for the present book: Max Scheler (1973a [1916], 1973b [1912], 1973c [1914–1916], 1960 [1921], 2017 [1923]); Alexander Pfänder (1967 [1900, 1911]); Nikolai Hartmann (1932 [1926]), Edith Stein (1989 [1917], 2000 [1922]); Dietrich von Hildebrand (1916, 1922, 1977, 1984, 2016–2018, 2020), Moritz Geiger (1986); Jean Héring (1921, 1926) Aurel Kolnai (1938, 1977, 2004, 2013); Herbert Spiegelberg (1986, 1989, 1935a, 1935b).

even those who would endorse a progressive value-commitment tend to use the word in reference to a *cultural heritage*—albeit a “good” (!) one, e.g., “the values of the Founders,” “the foundational values of our Republic,” “the American Way of Life,” and the like.[7]

Strangely enough, this use of the term is quite similar to the one we find in the works of the only major figure in the history of philosophy before the twentieth century who used it frequently in the plural form: Friedrich Nietzsche. As he writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Almost in the cradle we are presented with heavy words and values; this dowry calls itself ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’. For its sake we are forgiven for being alive.”[8]

But of course, if there is a consistent Nietzschean account of values, its main claim is that *there are* no values at all. Humankind is invited to find its ways dancing “beyond good and evil.” On this view, what we call values are just established *habits of evaluation* that result from internalizing social and cultural rules of behavior, which, in turn, are based on unstable balances of forces struggling for power. Emphasizing the plurality of values, for Nietzsche, was a means for unmasking the deceptive and self-deceptive unity and universality of “the Good,” whatever its alleged source, be it the will of God, the autonomy of the will, the happiness of the most, etc. In the twentieth century, this kind of “critical” thought merged with other trends of criticism of the “ideological” characters of ideals (e.g., of Marxist origin). Ideality and ideology tend to be conflated where these two powerful currents of thought coming from the past still reach to our present and flow into it. This does not make matters any clearer. Yet, that implicitly “critical suspicion” has more or less fused with the resonance that the word “values” has in the minds of most educated lay people today.

Finally, the word “values” gets used in the context of phrases like “our values” or “Western values.” This will be a central issue in this book. Most people cannot even imagine using that plural word without relativizing it with a possessive adjective. This fact tells us a lot about how cultural relativism has become the common sense of democratic societies. While writing this, I see—as many of us do—the ominous visage of the

[7] Wattenberg 1995.

[8] Nietzsche 1969 [1885] p. 211.

fundamentalist nodding in the name of the “absoluteness” of values. Strangely enough, it does not occur to him, or most of us, that if one is committed to a scientific truth that others ignore, one is supposed to remind them of the evidence available for that statement, and that it is at least in principle accessible to everybody: hence, one is supposed to appeal to *universality* (of epistemic access), not to *absoluteness* (a very unlikely attribute for scientific truths). But if one is committed to an article of faith, then the “absoluteness” one vindicates for one’s credo cannot but refer to one’s commitment,[9] not to the dogmatic content itself, since this is, by definition, only accessible to the believer as such, which means that the truth of this content cannot be mind-independent as, say, that of gravity, that holds “whether one believes it or not.” To the eyes of many, value statements hold a place somewhere in between scientific statements and articles of faith, a place that makes their epistemic status very elusive. Since this whole book—and its sixth chapter more systematically—is devoted to the attempt at clarifying this status, I shall leave it at that for the moment, except for a single remark about an unpleasant consequence of cultural relativism. “Values” as “our values” (that is, as membership qualifications for a group or a cultural identity) cannot be an unstructured bundle of values, each of which nobody would contest. A set of values defining a group identity must contain an order of priority not shared by other groups. Now, a cultural relativism has the consequence that, concerning orders of value priority, anything goes. So, what do we say, for example, about White Supremacy? Is it just my culture as a European academic that leads me to condemn this racist attitude as racist? Does the triumph of one position over another simply devolve, as Nietzsche would have it, into a relation of power? Or are there not, as I shall argue in this book, good reasons—evidence, if you will—for contending that racism is an evil, reasons that are in principle accessible to all and, therefore, not simply arbitrary? Isn’t there something intellectually

[9] It is no accident that in a world used to theological discussions a very accurate distinction between the *fides qua creditur*, or the act of believing, and the *fides quae creditur*, or the content of belief, was also in use: cf., Augustin, *De Trinitate* XIII, 2, taken up by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II IIae, q.2 a.2. For a very thorough discussion of the epistemology of belief, including excellent discussions of faith and doxastic voluntarism, see Engel 2019.

embarrassing about a position that would reduce the difference between racism and anti-racism to mere cultural relativism?

Apropos cultural relativism and universalism: I mentioned the "normative embodiment of practical reason" (Chap. 3) as a crucial event in the twentieth century. As I am writing this Introduction in Paris, I can't help recollecting the admiration I felt for the riches of the Musée de l'Homme, inaugurated in 1938 by the founders of French cultural anthropology, and its glorious emplacement in the Palais Chaillot at the Place du Trocadéro, where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed on December 10, 1948. Before this event, a long discussion took place on that extraordinary axiological turn that replaced the word "international" with the word "universal" in the title of the Declaration. Now, suspicion against universalism must be somehow inbuilt in cultural anthropology, since it is exactly from the American Anthropological Association that the strongest objection against that verbal replacement had come,[10] based on the claim that *any* normative statement is culturally relative. If this claim is true, then the Universal Declaration, too, is culturally relative: it is just a manifestation of Western culture—more exactly an expression of Western political liberalism. It is a fact about Western mentality, as shaped by a particular culture.

Now the principle of the equal dignity of humans, which overarches the structure of the document (its "arch and spire," so to speak), is definitely an "ideal"—that is, a normative principle rooted in the values of "equality" and "dignity"—that those committed to it believe ought to be observed, even if it is far from being observed in the real world, where it is extensively violated. Up to this point, the quarrel is about the question as to whether this ideal is a *correct* normative principle, that is, one liable to rational justification and, hence, such that the evidence for it is (in principle) universally accessible to the human mind, independently of particular human cultures; or whether, on the contrary, there is no evidence whatsoever for normative principles which would be cross-culturally accessible. In this sharper formulation, cultural relativism amounts essentially to value relativism. And this is exactly the claim that opposed French cultural anthropology to the "humanism of pure

[10] Flores 2008, p. 214.

reason"[11] that had initially been the credo and the mission of UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) since its main seat had been established in Paris immediately after the Second World War. Claude Lévi-Strauss, who had been collaborating with UNESCO in support of its anti-racialist campaign, did not hide, from the very beginning, his value relativism.[12] However, he introduced into the anti-universalistic attitude, which had become standard for empirical cultural anthropology, a further nuance.

It is a fact that scientific anthropology arose out of the Western colonial experience. The fundamental "human science" of the twentieth century was constituted essentially by making the colonized populations an object of research, which was actually funded in France by the Ministry of Colonies. This must have been lived as a kind of original sin by its protagonists—and by Lévi-Strauss in particular: not a personal sin, of course, but one that felt as if it were in his capacity of representing Western civilization.[13] This, at least, would explain why Lévi-Strauss increasingly distanced himself from the "humanism of pure reason"—as if universalism could be read as an *ideological* expression of a will of power, distinctive of Western civilization, or even worse, perhaps, as the pretense of a *particular* civilization to incarnate universality.[14] Now, this is still a

[11] Leiris 1951, p. 90. This actually was a credo for Lucien Lévy Bruhl, the author of *La mentalité primitive* (1922), and somehow the master of Lévi-Strauss, who founded the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Paris in 1925, together with Marcel Mauss, and an anthropologist of medical origin, Paul Rivet. This "humanism of pure reason" was assimilated to the residual "speculative" character of cultural anthropology at its beginning. While Lévy Bruhl's work, like Frazer's in Great Britain, is still based on erudition and the written reports of missionaries, functionaries, and explorers of the colonial domains, the generations of Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss are no longer "armchair anthropologists."

[12] Lévi-Strauss 1952.

[13] Lévi-Strauss 2011 [1955]. Think of the famous opening of this masterpiece: "*Je hais les voyages et les explorateurs.*" Or recall another passage: "Our great Western civilization, which has created the marvels we now enjoy, has only succeeded in producing them at the cost of corresponding ills. The order and harmony of the Western world, its most famous achievement, and a laboratory in which structures of complexity as yet unknown are being fashioned, demand the elimination of a prodigious mass of noxious by-products which now contaminate the globe. The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into the face of mankind" (p. 38).

[14] "*C'est que l'universel a mauvaise presse depuis qu'il a servi d'arme idéologique dans l'expansion coloniale de l'Europe, depuis qu'une conquête a tenté de se faire passer pour un processus d'intégration du singulier à l'universel.*" Angaut 2002.

very popular position, widely held in European progressive or leftist intellectual milieus.

So, we can see that contemporary ambivalence toward the language of values derives, at least in part, from the confluence of many currents of modern thought: nineteenth-century philosophies, twentieth-century social sciences, European and American anti-conservative, post-colonial and, of course, post-modern political thought. Underlying this ambivalence is an equally profound ambiguity in our understanding of ideality itself and its relation to lived experience.

Strangely enough, we no longer perceive anything particularly "nihilistic" about this legacy of Professor Zarathustra, the first and hardest critic of the "humanism of pure reason." Dissolving values into internalized rules admittedly implies value-relativism, but relativism, it is thought, is just the price you have to pay for secularism and the modern, liberal foundations of an open society. The idea that the rules governing our daily lives are ultimately either biologically grounded programs or socially constituted and arbitrary conventions seems to be common sense. If this is otherwise rejected, it is mostly on the ground of religious commitments, often associated with conservative political loyalties.

4 Discovering What Matters

What is the upshot of all this? If, following Husserl's admonition to "turn to the things themselves," we turn to any of the goods and ills that we experience every day, we make a remarkable discovery—and *discovery* is the operative word. Modern thought, even at its pinnacle in Kant's ethical philosophy, is essentially, and in all its forms, *constructivist*. But what we find is that "construction" has been the wrong image all along: the right word, as our experience shows, is *discovery*. What matters has always been discovered, not constructed. After all, even the Universal Declaration of 1948 was born of the experience of the destructive power of *discrimination*. Focusing on this *specific* injury, this specific part of injustice—focusing it through to the floods of suffering that discriminatory societies had brought about, through the witness of their victims—had enabled some minds, and us all, to see the black spot (one of the many) still left

in the Principles of 1789, in their very first article on men being born free and equal. The authors of the Declaration had pinned down the discovery by the right word: *dignity*. Equal *in dignity*, and, *therefore*, in rights. People had learned what discrimination—or trampled human dignity—feels like. That was, without a doubt, the experience of *dis*-value; its object was *that* sort of violated oughtness: that of equal dignity. An ideal, to be sure. The word "dignity" itself had undergone an alteration of meaning in a universalistic direction, which was far from the predominant sense of the word in its more ancient usage. "Recognition" is the very *epistemic* term used in the Preamble, as if the Universal Declaration were addressed to all members of humankind—including kings and presidents, politicians and public servants—setting forth the universally accessible evidence for recognition of this truth: namely, the atrocities experienced by the victims of states and committed by officials who did not acknowledge this truth but, instead, promoted and practiced racial discrimination.

From that point of view, that Preamble turns out to be a piece of Socratic philosophy. It teaches that taking human rights seriously means taking value *experience* seriously. This is precisely what all the axiological *constructions* that cement group identities—even the most perverse—protect themselves from: the lived experience of value. One of the most important areas of value-experience that the classics of phenomenology opened to philosophical research has been that of *empathy*, that is, perception of other subjects' negative or positive emotions: we might call it interpersonal value-experience. A recent video, whose vision set America on fire, showed a policeman in Minneapolis killing a black man by kneeling on his neck for almost nine minutes while the man croaked, "I can't breathe." This video might become the tragic symbol of the murderous power of self-blinding and self-deafening, these most shocking symptoms of a self-deception always accompanying "identitarian" crimes. It is no accident that commentators have recalled the "banality of evil."[15] In the reactions it stirred, on the other hand, it has also become a powerful symbol of empathy: suddenly, many who had been oblivious to the chronic injustices of their society were no longer able to "turn a blind eye" to what confronted them, face to face, as it were.

[15] Abdul-Jabbar 2020.

This brings us back to this book, and to the questions as to how and why all this axiological knowledge that had issued as its own normative embodiment in the post-war declarations had faded almost to the point of vanishing. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to an updated phenomenology of the banality of evil, working out the very beginnings of an answer to those questions. We *discover* what matters, we don't *construct* it. No once-and-for-all commitment to normative principles[16] can really be made ours and shape our choices and actions, our moral identity as individual persons, and, more broadly, our personal axiological profile, the order of what we "have at heart." It is only through trial and error, by letting that "heart" be questioned repeatedly about the appropriateness of its emotional responses to all sorts of claims coming from persons and things, that we really come to authentic, if precarious and constantly revisable, commitments. This is what we would call an "examined life" in the Socratic fashion. Here, what is examined is our emotional life, or its *receptive* heart: the life of feeling.

The updated phenomenology of the banality of evil that opens the book ultimately discovers that, when the receptive heart of value cognition is deadened and made obtuse, the citizen's personal life gets reduced to a condition of anonymity and is deprived of responsibility. This is a *phenomenology of cynical consciousness*. Two remarks might be useful concerning the choices made in this chapter, which affect the whole book.

On the one hand, I choose to focus my attention on the condition of *indifference* rather than of hatred and the negative social emotions that are more under philosophical scrutiny today.[17] I did this because I am convinced that those negative emotions are unleashed in their primitive violence only after the sense of one's *personal* responsibility fades away and, with it, the wakefulness and sensitive *discernment* of the relative weights of goods and ills, including the harms that our actions can cause.[18] It is no accident that feeling awareness tends to zero in looting or—worse—pseudo-accidental killing. And it is no accident that it is never in their

[16] *Pace* the contemporary representatives of a Kantian theory of selfhood—a most rigorous and successful form of ethical constructivism—e.g., Korsgaard 2009.

[17] Salice 2020, Szanto 2018.

[18] Thus, I entirely agree with the results of one of the most sensible analyses of negative social emotions recently published: Szanto 2018.

own name that the perpetrators kill or loot, but as bearers of a collective identity or in the full anonymity of the mass. However, such eclipses of sensibility and responsible personhood are not likely to happen suddenly, where a mature personal identity is also constituted at the level of axiological self-structuring that appears to be the most recent in human cultural evolution. By that, I mean the level of the still precarious selfhood designed by the anthropological experiment of modernity: the *autonomous* person, the source and subject of democratic sovereignty. In short, the citizen, or more generally the competent virtual judge of all norms ruling our communities and our freedom in them. *That competence*, indeed, was the target of modern education and its ideas and ideals, of liberty, reason, and the humanities—all the arches and spires of our universities.

This is why, on the other hand, this book, starting with the phenomenology of cynical consciousness, focuses on public vices where it all began, in the country of Machiavelli, Michelangelo, and Galileo. Where modernity first blossomed and then failed to be achieved in the moral and political sovereignty of Everyman. It failed once, in its first blossom, and on the occasions of further historical turns, later on. The phenomenology of cynical consciousness developed in this book is inspired by issues and customs rooted in Italian public life. This is a choice, motivated not only by its familiarity to me, but by my deep persuasion that a "figure of consciousness" so little changing across centuries[19] might offer an interesting case for all, especially by being closely connected to an eternalized state of being underage (in terms of civics) on which a large part of the population had to survive for such a long time before Italy's political independence, and, in many respects, even after it. This choice might exhibit a kind of "eidetic" physiognomy that would make it a paradigm of a constant threat to this globalized world's fragile democracies. After all, fascism was invented in Italy. And too much of the richness and novelty of classic and contemporary Italian thought will keep being ignored until more light is shed on those aspects of the human condition that Italy has embedded for centuries, for good and evil. How many

[19] As documented by at least three masterpieces of Italian literature: Guicciardini 1972 [1512–1530], Leopardi 1969 [1823], and Tomasi di Lampedusa 1960 [1958].

masters of moral incorruptibility, of noble-minded civic thought, of far-seeing political understanding were there in the country of Harlequin and Punchinello, who still go ignored to the advantage of some popular epigones of Hegel, Heidegger, or Foucault?[20]

In Chap. 2 I show that an untutored emotional life does *not* grow of its own accord into moral maturity and personal sovereignty where the search for truth, more basically the wakeful attention to the axiological data of personal and social life, does not become the second, educated nature of persons. A correct relationship to truth in axiological matters, the exercise of "right" discrimination and discernment, the training of the heart to exactness, and, above all, a developed repugnance for self-deception are all central: that's what the humanities in education were supposed to be all about. But the lesson is that the anthropological revolution of modernity, the ascent of the many from the servile to the sovereign condition, is bound to fail where Socrates retreats, and the examined life of feeling is no part of ordinary schooling.

Bernard Williams, in a very popular book against the "illusion" that philosophy could have any relevance for ethics, let alone enlighten or ground it, identifies this project which modernity has shown to be illusory with the Socratic project:

> It is not a trivial question, Socrates said: what we are talking about is how one should live. Or so Plato reports him, in one of the first books written about this subject. Plato thought that philosophy could answer the question.[21]

I do not think that this is a correct representation of Socrates' legacy. Socrate's focus is not on the good life, but on truth and knowledge. At the very heart of Socrates' questioning, in Plato's dialogues, we do not find "us" and our life, but "the basic contradiction dominating any personal

[20] Some of them—such as Norberto Bobbio—will be quoted; many others nourished these pages without being always explicitly mentioned—among them, for the twentieth century, are Piero Gobetti, Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi, Nicola Chiaromonte, Aldo Capitini, Guido Calogero, and Adriano Olivetti. Among the nineteenth-century writers, see Leopardi 1969 [1823] and (especially interesting in post-pandemic times) the chapters on the plague by Manzoni 1984 [1827].

[21] Williams 1985, p. 1.

wakeful life, namely, that between unclear opinion and evidence," as Husserl puts it in one of his most penetrating remarks. Socrates placed this basic contradiction "into the very focus of the ethical concern": this makes philosophy a kind of permanent anthropological revolution. Before being a special life (that of the scientist), knowledge or the search for truth is the ethical life. "Plato transposed the Socratic method of justification to science."[22]

This change of accent is subtle but decisive. The focus of the ethical concern is not on the good life, but on clarity and knowledge, or the quest for them, concerning our more or less passively inherited beliefs of *all* sorts: on facts, values, things to do. If Bernard Williams recapitulates the reasons for skepticism of his whole century, classical phenomenology, on the opposite side, has been a great, ambitious project of renewing the legacy of Socrates, not as a rationalism for ethics, but as a method to reach the given, intuitive, ultimate *sources of legitimate, or justifiable, normativity* in all fields of human personal and social life—in fact, of the practical as well as the theoretical life. Classical phenomenology is about the ideas (the *eide*, or invariant structures) of all kinds of ideal norms, from logic to ethics, encompassing the indefinitely open set of the practical sciences concerning our institutions (law or jurisprudence) and artifacts (from architecture to artificial intelligence), and all the theoretical sciences, from physics to sociology.

Axiology concerns a subset of eidetic properties that are global qualities of given and possible goods and ills and that ground all norms for actions (practical norms, *Tunsollen*) that are amenable to ideal "oughts" (*Seinsollen*), rather than to arbitrary wills or factual powers. They give the "reason," indeed, to the "reasons for actions."

This is why a daily "examined life" is required for thought and action alike. Particular axiological knowledge is definitely *not* to be achieved once for all, but has to be verified and extended daily again and again, by opening wide the eyes and ears and affective sensitivity to the demands of the things present, rooted in their being, that is in the essential interdependencies among them and our life (ecological crises teach), and in the

[22] Husserl 1956 [1923–1924], pp. 9–12.

(dis)value of qualities constitutive of the artifacts and social objects of our making.

Providing the tools for such an everyday quest is the project that this book takes over.

5 The Fauna of Axiological Skepticism and the *pars construens*

In Chaps. 3 and 4, the phenomenology of cynical consciousness gives way to a study of the learned side of axiological skepticism. The withdrawal of Socratic questioning from the public sphere corresponds to the age of "disenchantment": the highest distrust in value *cognition* and practical reason that humankind (or, perhaps, Western culture) has known in its entire history. The multifarious currents of thought that have made value skepticism dominant are addressed in their diversity and in their implications. Recall: the issue was, on the one hand, the embodiment of practical reason in the supranational and national institutions of post-war democracy, and, on the other hand, a sort of retreat of the "spirit"—and the philosophical soul—that we subsequently experienced. One of the few knights of axiological reason—and perhaps the bravest of them—the American legal philosopher and jurist Ronald Dworkin (1931–2013) acts as our guide, introducing us to a survey of the main currents of axiological skepticism in twentieth-century philosophy. Drawing on his reproposal of the dispute between the philosophical Hedgehog (a value cognitivist) and the skeptical Fox, we learn to know several kinds of Foxes. Starting from classics such as Max Weber or Isaiah Berlin, we are led into harder arguments against the protagonists of a wide spectrum of intellectual betrayal of the Socratic spirit, including Martin Heidegger, whose newly published *Schwarze Hefte* are deeply troubling and reveal the roots of the intellectual irresponsibility of his thought, as well as that of its numerous heirs in French and Italian philosophy. Nihilism is examined both in its pseudo-mystical forms and in the political decisionism of Carl Schmitt (the Wolf-Foxes) and his followers, but also in its postmodern, pseudo-liberal *relativistic* versions (the Moth-Foxes). The

mixtures of Hegelian and Heideggerian contempt of ethics and logic in such a large part of Continental leftist post-war ideology belongs within this spectrum, too.

Yet, at the core of these critical chapters, I attempt to address a much nobler and more reasonable adversary, the king of the honest liberal Foxes: John Rawls and his post-Kantian, normative ethical and political legacy. Constructivism is presented as a form of mistrust in the *cognitive seriousness of value experience*. This criticism, addressing the increase in political realism and the corresponding loss in normative character that Rawls's foundation of liberalism undergoes during his intellectual career, updates the criticism that classical phenomenologists (especially Scheler and Husserl) addressed to Kantian and Neo-Kantian ethics, before turning to Moore and its contemporary metaethical heritage at the beginning of Chap. 6.

All the strands of this critical survey converge toward one desideratum: that of a complete change of attitude and style in philosophy, by *a bottom-up methodology* reversing the *top-down strategy* followed up to now in all research into the sources of normativity.

The following *pars construens*, in view of which the rest of the book has been written, presenting a first outline of general axiology in five theses, is left to the reader without further comments. It can, of course, be read independently of its background and context, even if its *raison d'être* as a basis for further research, and some of the arguments supporting it are to be found in the four preceding chapters.

Maybe the mist, though, has not been dispelled from one last words of those pertaining to the lexicon of ideality: *idealism*. There is a current meaning of this word that the reader of this Introduction will probably feel inclined to attribute to me and this book. If "idealism" here is understood in contrast with "political realism" or even "cynicism," the attribution is obviously welcome. But there is another more technical use of the term, under the weight of which a deadly misunderstanding has pushed the champions of attentiveness and receptivity toward the data and the "things themselves"—the classics of phenomenological philosophy—on the side of some champions of the opposite attitude, ascribing all power to the mind: the German idealists. Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and his confrères were, indeed, the champions of a self-glorification of the ego and

the we and their agency, as a source of whatever has meaning and value in this world, and whose transcendental pride of reason was definitely more inclined to a kind of self-absorption than to a Socratic self-criticism. Now, phenomenologists are resolute value realists, if value realism means that our value statements have truth conditions independent of our desires, our beliefs and our intentions, our customs and institutions, our cultures, our epochs. It is my hope that this too-long introduction may persuade the reader that this realism has a subjective correlate in a virtue that might become the philosophical virtue par excellence, along with our capacity for wonder: intellectual humility.

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2

Phenomenology of the Cynical Consciousness

Ever since marriage, and courts of law,
and the altar taught us human beasts
to be kind to ourselves and to one another.
—Ugo Foscolo, *Sepulchres*

1 A Mysterious Metamorphosis

There is a dimension of our human condition that is invisible to the gaze of the natural and social sciences: the conscience of individuals—or, more specifically, how the individual conscience stands in relation to the institutions of public life.

Not long ago, I saw a stunning depiction of this aspect of the human condition on visiting an exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, Italy, that featured the work of two great Mannerist painters, Rosso Fiorentino and Jacopo Pontormo. There, a large painting by Rosso presented me with the image of the great mystery to which this book is dedicated: the origin of public evil. To give you a sense of the kind of revelation I experienced upon seeing this painting, an experience I must have shared

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with many other spectators, it is necessary to understand the placement of the painting, the *Deposition from the Cross* of 1527–1528, in the gallery.

This painting, on loan from the church of San Lorenzo in Sansepolcro, had been completed soon after the Sack of Rome (1527). It was hung in the next-to-last hall. After that, in the final hall, you found yourself enveloped by a smug and indifferent chill, with walls covered in tapestries and other decorations showing where Mannerism finally would end up: in the service of the French court. At that point, two masterpieces of triviality loomed before one's eyes: one a scene featuring the amorous gods Venus and Mars, looking as though they had just emerged from a high-end fitness center; the other, a depiction of the Passion reminiscent of twisting exercises one might witness in a gym, in which the most visible elements are the blonde curls of an oddly portrayed Saint John, sporting an *au courant* coiffure fit for the baroque court. The organizers of the show had knowingly put on vivid display the abruptness of the collapse of civilization.

At first, this kind of collapse manifests itself only as unexpected and delicate cracks in the unsuspecting souls of geniuses. Then, little by little, it becomes visible to all. In that next-to-last hall, in fact, on two adjoining walls, one could see both Pontormo's *Visitation* (1528–1529)—a marriage of grace and beauty (with its four-way dance of the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, her cousin, doubled by the figures of two female servants)—and Rosso's *Deposition*, which is the exact contrary, a truly shocking image of the Beast, in which form is distorted by the sudden crumble and collapse of all that was the dawning of modern civilization: liberty, reason, and *humanitas*. All this is concentrated in the wild look of the Roman soldier holding a lance, in whom a *metamorphosis* is taking place right before our eyes: a human face becoming that of a beast.

I know of no better way than this powerful image to portray the unconscious, inner metamorphosis—one that is often invisible to the one undergoing it (or surrendering to it, but unknowingly)—that is the *self-abdication* of the moral subject. This kind of metamorphosis is the prelude to civilization's convolutions, whatever form they may take: apocalyptic or tragic, as was the case in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, or a furtive destruction of sense and goodness that is still consistent with the vacuous and ornamental, as we saw in the last hall of

the exhibition. Curiously, we do not know which of these two our present situation resembles the most.

It is this ever-possible interior metamorphosis as an aspect of our condition that I want to take as our point of departure for a phenomenology of the cynical consciousness. This self-abdication of the moral subject is something that takes place in our minds, something that has a close connection to what the scholastics called the *incohatio mali*, the "inception," hidden even to conscience itself, of what will appear only *post factum*—if at all—as a sin, even to the agent him or herself. But, for philosophers, the nature of moral evil has always been an enigma; even if we want to study a particular aspect of moral evil, we must not presuppose a specific understanding of it, so we have to reconcile ourselves to setting out in the dark. At the same time, the mystery from which we must start is one that is familiar to everyone since, sooner or later, every one of us experiences it. We know it in our experience of lost friendships, broken bonds, and disrupted collective endeavors. It manifests itself not so much to the person who is experiencing it as to the social circles around that person, taking the form of a peculiar *mutation of conscience*, which manifests itself in behaviors, attitudes, and choices, or just in the emotive and expressive responses to significant events in the sphere of public or political life. This mutation in one's way of feeling can take place quite suddenly, at least in appearance.

It is an elusive mutation, to be sure, but a very common one, so much so that, at certain moments, it becomes a kind of epidemic without much hope of diagnosis. Indeed, one of its most recognizable effects is the ostracizing of those who try to warn against it, who get branded as Cassandras, prophets of doom, alarmists, moralists, killjoys. And yet, because of it, republics implode and democracies self-destruct.[1]

The aspect of the human condition that I want focus on concerns that part of the conscience that "responds to" the public dimension of life. This part of our thoughts, feelings, wishes, and decisions is especially relevant in democratic societies, where—ideally, at least—the distribution of the power that makes institutions effective, in particular political ones, is

[1] The intuition concerning the sudden, contagious nature and the irresistible force of a socially relevant mutation that, at first, few notice is endowed with a negative value, is captured in the great metaphor of civilizational decline experienced by Europe during the age of totalitarianism: Albert Camus's *The Plague* (Camus 2002 [1947]).

founded on the free, personal, and explicit consent of individuals. The distribution of power, of course, not only throughout most of human history but even for the greater part of life in modern democratic societies, is not really founded on any explicit *consensus* so much as on its simple *recognition*—that is, it does not necessarily have the character of an *approval* but rather of a simple *acceptance* (whether by feeling or by force). One could say, then, that what takes place in people's minds influences, regardless of the type of civilization and its political regime, those institutional changes that determine the lesser or greater justness of a society. This kind of circle, which may be vicious or virtuous depending on the direction it takes, is perhaps part of the truth that remains in the Platonic idea (though unserviceable in other regards) that there is a correlation between the morality of the individual and the justice of the city.

On the other hand, the aspect of public evil whose origin we would like to investigate is, as we said, one that is largely "invisible" to the eye of the social sciences—one that has its roots in the lives and consciences of persons. This is also because, when we speak of something that has to do with our condition, we are clearly speaking of a phenomenon that concerns not this or that human society but rather the life associated with persons as such, at least in the forms that the history of civilizations, liberal studies, and, in the end, the basis of our educational programs make accessible to our understanding—as Ugo Foscolo's verse, cited in the epigraph, reminds us.

So, it is appropriate, first of all, to specify what this inner metamorphosis is a passage *from* and *to*. In short: it is not simply a passage from good to evil—or at least not wittingly. After all, if we all saw things clearly, and all of us in the same way, there would be no question as to what is good and what is evil, nor would the answer to the question remain so obscure to us after so many ages.

Rather, we are talking about a change of preferences, a reinvestment of allegiances, let us say, from the *ideal* to the *real*. Or rather, it has to do with a transfer of one's capacities of participation, one's allegiance, from the uncertainty of an imagined "better" possibility, to the certainty of a "winning" reality. In short, from impotence to sharing in power, no matter what form that may take. The last hall of the Palazzo Strozzi exhibition comes again to mind, the one containing the splendors of the French

court. Board and lodging were guaranteed then, and probably also lavish compensation for the talents that served as the court's pleasure.

The man in Rosso's painting whose face is becoming animal-like is a "soldier," one who is, probably, one of the mercenaries in the Sack of Rome—a hired gun who adhered to a real, winning cause. But the metamorphosis whose essence we wish to grasp is not merely the quite common phenomenon of jumping on the winner's bandwagon, though this is one of its aspects.

Rather, the metamorphosis in question is not so much a conversion to evil, but, characteristically, a *conversion to reality*, as in realpolitik. This is a conversion that takes place in the shadows of the axiological—or value—consciousness.[2]

It is a profound aspect of the origin of public evil that the entire tradition, both Greek and Christian, has imagined in different ways: in the image of a god that *blinds* the one whom he wishes to ruin, or, on the other hand, in the notion that sin seems like a feather to the sinner but like a mountain to the saint. These are, quite explicitly, two ways of describing a kind of cognitive impairment, a blindness to *(dis)value* and its specific *gravity*.

One cannot address questions about public evil and its origins, and more generally questions about value experience, without being reminded of Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil, maybe the most popular analysis of the moral complicity with last century's European totalitarianisms.[3] How much did this analysis improve upon earlier traditions?

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[2] Cf. Chap. 1, note 1. From now on, I will use this term in the more global sense of "relating to values"—not only the ethical and, more generally, practical values, but also aesthetic, religious, vital, and sensorial values. One of the limits of most academic work on value theory (see Chap. 1) is a widely shared tendency to flatten the axiological out into a single dimension: namely, the ethical.

[3] This famous formulation is explained in a letter, often cited, from Hannah Arendt to Gershom Scholem on July 20, 1963: "The fact is that today I think that evil in every instance is only extreme, never radical: it has no depth, and therefore has nothing demonic about it. Evil can lay to waste the entire world, like a fungus growing rampant on the surface. Only the good is always deep and radical" (Arendt and Scholem 2017, p. 209). See also Arendt 2006, her stunning report on the trial of German Nazi SS leader Adolf Eichmann, that first appeared as a series of articles in *The New Yorker* in 1963. The revised edition of 2006 includes material that came to light after the trial, as well as Arendt's postscript commenting on the controversy that arose over her book. The pamphlet's phenomenology has been richly developed by several other authors—among whom Todorov 1997, not to mention the "gray zone" of Primo Levi 2004 [1958, 1963], or the studies of Milgram 2009 [1974] and Zimbardo 2007.

2 What We Have Learned from the Theory of the Banality of Evil

Since a thorough discussion of Arendt's thought on this subject would be misplaced here, I shall limit myself to state how I view my work in relation to this famous idea. I take this expression, "banality of evil," to be somewhat misleading and refer to the above described phenomenon of self-abdication of the moral subject. Quite independently of the question whether this moral category fits the case for which Arendt first introduced it—the case of Adolf Eichmann—I think that pointing to this moral phenomenon as such, and as a massive component of such forms of public evil as are the authoritarian, totalitarian, illiberal, and populistic degenerations of democracies, was a meritorious phenomenological contribution. However, I do not think that the philosophical conceptualization that Hannah Arendt provided of such a phenomenon is adequate, as I shall argue in this section.[4]

One may wonder whether there are specific cultural variants of that sort of self-abdication of the moral subject. In earlier works, I have pointed to some features of the cynical consciousness that might indeed constitute such an "Italian variant of the 'banality of evil'."[5] However, even the classical phenomenology of the "banal" evil needs a supplement of philosophical analysis, to go beyond the stage of mere description.

I do think that there is a *male nostrum*, an evil whose appearance is due to certain peculiarities that belong to a given cultural tradition (the Italian only serves as an example here). But in truth, the nature of "banal" evil is universal, as the alarming studies of Stanley Milgram on obedience and

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[4] In his 2016 book on Arendt and Heidegger, Emmanuel Faye provides a powerfully documented essay on the role that Arendt's thought played in the clearance of Heideggerianism and the "banalization" of the "destruction of philosophy"—where by "philosophy" we mean an exercise of theoretical and practical reason, humanism, and an "examined life" striving to adult moral autonomy, all of this being "deconstructed" in the frame of Heidegger's critique of enlightened modernity (Faye 2016). While I entirely agree on the unsolved contradiction, in Arendt's thought, between her very Heideggerian view of modernity and her late writings on individual moral responsibility, I keep thinking that she did hit upon a deeply interesting moral phenomenon on occasion of the Eichman report, one that deserves better conceptual analysis, as can be provided by phenomenological axiology.

[5] See De Monticelli 2011 (pp. 142–148) and De Monticelli 2013e.

authority, published in the wake of Hannah Arendt's writings on the subject, demonstrated.[6] His experiments are well known. Subjects are led to believe that the aim of the study is to determine the correlation between punishment and learning. They are then asked to assume the roles of teachers and to subject their "students" (who are, in reality, actors that, unbeknownst to the subjects, are complicit with the experimenters) to electric shocks of increasing intensity each time they fail memory tests. There are various settings for the electric shocks, but at least partial physical contact is ensured: the subjects can hear the laments and, eventually, the screams of their "students." The result is disconcerting: nearly two-thirds of the experimental subjects kept punishing their student right up to the last button, the one that would administer the most violent shock.[7] Similar results came of the experiments conducted around a decade later by Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University, which were dedicated to investigating human behavior in a society in which individuals are defined exclusively by the group to which they belong (in this case, the roles of guards and prisoners assigned to willing volunteers inside a simulated prison).[8]

This "banal" kind of evil does not fall within any of the classical categories of moral evil, weakness, or wickedness of will, and thus is not assigned a place in any of the circles of hell: neither in Dante's high Inferno, where weakness of will and sins of the flesh are expiated, nor in the low Inferno, separated from the former by the Stygian swamp of wrath and sloth, in which one finds the real wickedness of the will

[6] Milgram 2009 [1974]. More recently, Milgram's experiment has come under methodological attack by Hans Bernhard Schmidt (2011). While we can agree that drawing moral conclusions from a morally questionable experiment, based on false information administered to the subjects, is in itself questionable, it seems to me that the experiment keeps showing a striking lack of critical attitude toward the suggested bias (the undisputable moral legitimacy of "scientific" procedure).

[7] Ibid.

[8] On this note, Zygmunt Bauman wrote that, whereas the percentage of those who sought to kill by way of their own initiative was rather low, as was the percentage of whose who abstained from wrongdoing altogether, "an extensive 'middle ground' was filled by people who were indifferent, lukewarm, and not particularly engaged or strongly committed to one or the other end of the attitudinal spectrum, avoiding taking any stand, whether for morality or against it, and preferring instead to follow the line of least resistance and do whatever prudence dictated, and unconcern allowed them to do at the time" (Bauman 2010, Letter 42, 176). See also Zimbardo 2007.

punished, that is, where punishment falls on the sinners who consented to the evils they committed.

Although it does not fit neatly into any of these grand categories of sinful lives, it may cut across them all. Indeed, this is strikingly suggested in Dante's pre-Inferno of the faceless ("these wretches, who were never alive") who were neutral in the face of evil, or all-too-ready to be at the service of the powerful. The phenomenon known as the "banality of evil," however, is arguably irreducible to this sort of indolent cowardice. Nor is it reducible to a moral fault best analyzed in the modern period by Kant's theory of "radical evil": that is, the endemic impurity of the moral conscience, which can never be certain that it is not deceiving itself or hiding immoral motivations behind seemingly moral reasons.[9] That said, one should recall the penetrating observation by Karl Jaspers, who, in a letter to Arendt herself, noted the coincidence of Kantian "radical evil" and "banal" evil, at least in the ever-looming ambiguity of a self-justification that is devoid of evidence, and thus always subject to the risk of being nothing other than mere "rationalization."[10]

The fact is that the *phenomenology* of the banality of evil—if not the fragmentary and equivocal *theory* Arendt herself attempted to outline—constitutes the discovery of an *essential* trait of moral evil. Arendt rediscovered the universal phenomenon of the *virtual disappearance of the face of individuals into the collective*, the phenomenon of the incredible solubility of personal conscience under the immense force of social pressure. The epistemic conditions of this discovery date back to the past century and the emergence of organized masses on the political scene, which provided vast evidence of the self-abdication of the moral person and his or her autonomy that became possible when handed over—or "outsourced," in current parlance—to grand ideological-political organizations. But even this self-abdication had no need of mass society to reveal itself, as Dostoevsky's story of the Grand Inquisitor makes clear. Casting aside liberty and moral responsibility in exchange for security and protection is certainly not a new temptation. If anything, it is the possibility of *resisting* this temptation that dates back not earlier than to the end of the *ancien*

[9] Kant 1998 [1793].

[10] Jaspers 1971 [1935].

régime. Should we conclude, then, that the Enlightenment ideal of a society that promotes and presupposes the existence of morally autonomous subjects is a utopia? This, too, is one of our questions.

The classic studies on the banality of evil confirm that those who were responsible for extreme evil had a lack of awareness not so much of the *fact* but rather of the *negative value* of their own actions, much as those who tacitly consented to that evil lacked awareness of the disvalue of their omissions. They confirm the datum of the *relative or absolute moral blindness*, albeit limited to a determinate domain of moral judgment, the public sphere, of many among those both actively and passively responsible for Europe's civilizational catastrophes during the twentieth century: good fathers and mothers, good employees and civil servants, became accomplices of political criminals. The new knowledge about the phenomenon of evil that the theory of the banality of evil brought to light depends in large part on the novelty of the fact itself: an unprecedented extension of the consensus that civil populations had apparently accorded—freely (at least in the beginning)—to the most heinous political projects. Indeed, the moral nature of first Fascism and then Nazism was sufficiently clear at the time to all those who did not blind themselves to it, as the early opponents of both forms of totalitarianism bear witness.[11]

More complex, though partially analogous, is the discourse on the enduring blindness of many who were capable of seeing and judging, and yet remained uncritical as far as possible towards the so-called "socialism realized." The analogy is only partial, since that misguided or blind faithfulness was accompanied by a corruption of ideality into ideology—another of the tragic phenomena of the twentieth century. There is a consistency between political liberalism and ideas of social justice, and

[11] As is well known, an overwhelming majority of academics conformed to Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, and the infiltration of Fascism and Nazism in academia also extends to Japan (many Japanese philosophers of the Kyoto School associated themselves with Japan's imperialistic politics in the 1930s). Among the emigrant philosophers, one of the most lucid analyses of Nazi ideology and its supporters was offered by Aurel Kolnai, a phenomenologist, student of Husserl, and admirer of Scheler, whose study of the negative emotions has recently gained momentum, but whose work develops a very original phenomenology of politics, praised by authors like Karl Popper, Raymond Aron, Axel Honneth, David Wiggins, and Bernard Williams (who were editors of Kolnai 1977). He published an essay on "Heidegger and National Socialism" as early as 1934 (Kolnai 2013, pp. 85–90), and in 1938 a ponderous book on all the moral, cultural, political, and philosophical aspects of Nazism (Kolnai 1938).

this includes socialism as an ideal within the range of political positive values suitable for universal acknowledgment in the modern age, making it compatible with practical reason. This, however, is definitely *not* the case for Fascism or Nazism, not even in their germinal forms.[12]

What interests us is this relatively new aspect of the semi-passive co-responsibility of whole national communities that the theoreticians and narrators of banal evil have brought to light: that this is a potential of human behavior that is by no means contingent or tied to specific historical situations, but completely universal and corresponds to a degree of "solubility" that the individual moral conscience has under the force of social pressure or constituted authority. This comes as a surprise, at least for observers with a liberal educational background. As Hannah Arendt herself observed, "Kantian" morality—which meant, first and foremost, high praise of the *autonomy* of moral judgment—had been utterly ineffective at preparing the educated German classes for real moral judgment.

For this reason, let's observe that, rather than "banal"—a term that has inspired a great deal of confusion and polemic—we should define this kind of evil as "anonymous": not because the responsibility in question is not personal, but because its primary characteristic is that of not being assumed in the first person, lucidly, and, so to speak, "luciferously" as one's own act.[13] This act/non-act, this passive motion of resigning from one which we have defined as the self-abdication of the moral subject, is symbolized by that image of a human face that is transforming into that of a beast.

Corresponding to this "anonymity" *a parte subiecti*, the most familiar manifestation of which is conformism, the characteristic type of evil *a parte objecti* is the demise of justice in the institutions and habitual relations of everyday common life: in other words, *public* evil.

[12] According to the analysis that Jeanne Hersch provided in the 1950s of the deep difference between the two totalitariansystems, this difference made Communist ideology intellectually more dangerous, in general, than the brutal ideological productions of Nazi and Fascist writers. See Hersch 1956. However, Hersch's analysis also highlights the lack of intellectual and moral responsibility haunting a vast majority of post-war French "Rive Gauche" philosophers because of their neglect of the deep roots of Heidegger's Nazism in his fundamental notions, and their adoption of Heideggerianism as a critique of modernity. We shall come back to this issue in Chap. 5.

[13] See De Monticelli 2008, 266–268.

3 Introduction to a Phenomenology of the Experience of Values

In terms of the crucial point of passive or active co-responsibility and, more generally, the mysterious phenomenon of the solubility of the personal moral conscience into the anonymity of a collective, the classic descriptions of "banal" evil are an improvement over both ancient and modern moral theories. But they are perhaps less instructive than tradition on two other points: namely, the *experience of value*, on which they are silent (because they entirely lack a *theory* of value in the proper sense), and the *dynamic of value*, which flows from passive into active evil or consenting to it (because they also have no proper theory of the will).[14]

If it is true that the changes that concern the shared life of people (and thus their collectivities and their institutions) sometimes arise with a suddenness that gives war, revolutions, or radical political degeneration the appearance of a natural disaster, it is just as true that the zeitgeist had meanwhile been working, in its own unperceived way, to make such breaks possible. Now, if we are convinced that there is no *entity* endowed with causal powers that this expression "spirit of the age"—or "spirit of the world"—refers to, and that certainly the effect of many activities and individual habits escapes the intentions and expectations of agents, but does not ultimately derive from any source other than individuals,[15] then

[14] For these essential elements of a phenomenological axiology, see Chap. 6. For a deeper analysis of the theory of the will, see De Monticelli 2012, especially Part II.

[15] Currently there are many philosophers who challenge methodological individualism, at least insofar as it tends to become also an "ontological" individualism. Social ontology precisely investigates the status not only of social objects like money or flags, but also of social acts, and, more interestingly in the present context, social or collective subjects (De Vecchi 2014a). For an enlightening distinction between collective, social, and intersubjective intentionality see De Vecchi 2014b. On "plural subjects" not being reducible to the mere sum of individual agents see Gilbert 2014. However, I don't see how, even if one were to accept this thesis of irreducibility, that would challenge *ethical* individualism, that is, the thesis that, whatever common enterprise one might *voluntarily* participate in, the *moral* responsibility of actions, personal or shared, remains personal and individual. On the other hand, is *involuntarily* belonging to a group identity liable to imply *moral* responsibility for any act performed by members of that group, and actively or passively resisted by a subject? Is the notion of *collective moral* responsibility coherent? For an early phenomenological approach to social ontology, see Reinach 1989 [1913] and Schutz 1967 [1932].

there must be a kind of mental change that constitutes a new, different "mentality" and concerns, at least virtually, each and every one of us.

After all, the phenomenological method that we are employing consists, primarily, in the systematic and idealized adoption of a first-person perspective on the object under discussion: "systematic" because it does not attribute to the object any characteristics other than those given in such *experience* as anyone can have of them, and "ideal" because it proceeds without regard to all the particularities and contingencies dependent on the fact that the point of view is our own. The first-person perspective, phenomenologically speaking, is one that *any* person can adopt toward any given thing.

But just as those who forget are not actually aware of forgetting unless something happens to make them remember, and just as ignorance does not know itself as such, so every example of gradual cognitive loss goes unnoticed by those who suffer from it. This is perhaps why the image of metamorphosis in the face of Rosso's soldier is so shocking. Every great artist can say with Horace "*de te fabula narratur*," it is of you that the tail speaks, and Rosso is no exception. In this face, we see the revelation of what can happen to any one of us before we notice it: losing the essential traits of our humanity. To fully embody a moral subject might seem like an essential feature of being human. Indeed, the self-abdication of the moral subject within us is not a change that can happen, generally speaking, in the full light of one's awareness, even though avoiding this change is undoubtedly in the power of one's freedom, at least as much as the soldier's actions are. It is this combination of obscurity, opacity, and spontaneity that allows the origin of moral evil to remain such an enigma.

"Absolute" evil exists for us only in the past, after the killing is over. Thus, the lie that everyone recognizes as such can do no harm. A lie's evil is effective when the falsity is still mixed with truth, and for this reason so many people think they are justified in endorsing it by turning their eyes away from its part of falsity. Even the lie kills only as long as it is not absolute. And so it is with every moral evil: as Simone Weil noted in one of her deepest insights, "true evil is not evil, but good and evil joined together."[16] Only where there is a mixture can the gaze look away from

[16] Cited in Pétrement 1973, p. 662, from a posthumous paper of the London period (1942–1943).

evil and look to the good, no matter how small. It can *ignore* the evil. Consider the counterevidence: absolute evil, evil that is *recognized by all to be such*, has lost its grip, has become *impotent*. Only a few crazies now raise swastikas. Quite different is the case of the vast following of people throughout xenophobic Europe whose ferocity hides behind the inadequacy and incoherence of the laws on immigration.

So, there are good reasons to say that the change whose nature is under investigation is not a conversion to evil, but rather a conversion to *reality*—one in which good and evil are constantly intertwined. To be sure, this formula requires some clarification. But our investigation will not run out of current instances, for today we observe a shared mentality that truly and tangibly exemplifies this widespread phenomenon, which I will call the *erosion of ideality*.

4 The Erosion of Ideality

The phenomenon of the erosion of ideality is widespread; its depth and pervasiveness impedes our attempts to take stock of it, since we are immersed in it like fish in water. This is the first claim of this phenomenology of the cynical consciousness.

This phenomenon consists in the flattening out of what *ought* to be on what *is*, of value in favor of fact, of norm in favor of common practice—however abnormal—and, ultimately, of right in favor of might. "The real is rational and the rational is real," writes the philosopher who puts reason on the side of force, as long as it is victorious. "The real is the normal and the normal is real" might be the motto of the contemporary cynicism that has so permeated everyday language. The way the word "normality" is currently used today retains not even a trace of its original meaning, which derives directly from the word "norm." "Normal" is now simply what is more often done, including what is contrary to norms. The statistical, "factual" meaning of the word seems to prevail entirely, in current language, over the original reference to an "ought." From a statistical point of view, in a given society and at a given time, a certain amount of abuse and bullying are normal; and so are—as concerns the legal language—sanctioning and condoning (illegal building, tax evasion),

announcement (of severe sanctions) and disclaimer (of their applicability). There are regions where, statistically speaking, a certain amount of political corruption is "normal" (e.g., trafficking with mafias and administering the law; preaching competition but fixing contests in advance; praising meritocracy but practicing nepotism and favoritism). However, when "statistical," impassive description seems to replace even mild forms of concern in the minds of most citizens, doesn't this perceived "normality" become very alarming? One could go on at length with all that "ought not" to be and yet is, as it were, perceived as ineluctable: the ever-increasing disproportion in the distribution of wealth, opportunity, well-being, and hope; anguish toward a future reserved to the younger generations; or our overall incapacity to offer persuasive ideals and paradigms of value and sense. *Unde malum?* Where does all this come from, and what is the nature of this public evil?

The examples of this erosion of ideality, or reduced awareness of what *ought and ought not* to be, that we have drawn on, not just from most peoples' lives but even in our current language, are sufficiently varied to show that this reflection is by no means a political broadside, or worse, a generic diatribe against some unknown "others" who oppress us. The erosion of ideality concerns the behavior of us all. It concerns the entire sphere of public ethics, even if I draw some of my examples from my experience as an Italian.[17]

We often hear about "the end of ideologies," but this, far from shining a light on the nature of ideality, leaves it hidden in the shadows. Ideologies need just an ersatz ideality for appearances sake, they are substitutes for it, degenerated versions of it. And even the metaphor of "liquid societies," popularized by Zygmunt Bauman (2010), obscures rather than illuminates the nature of ideality. It makes us think of ideality as a complex of rigid or solid structures, which at a certain point become liquid: one

[17] Italy is maybe the European country with the greatest number of laws and the highest rate of illegality. It was first in Europe, in the G8, and the entire West in perceived corruption and sixty-ninth among the most "virtuous" nations according to Transparency International before the pandemics. Corruption was estimated to make up 40% of every great urban project: high-velocity rail costed an average of €61 million per kilometer versus the €10.2 million of the Paris–Lyon railroad, the €9.8 million of the Madrid–Seville, and the €9.3 million of the Tokyo–Osaka (EU Commission). Italian tax evasion was among the highest in Europe according to several OCSE reports before the pandemic.

thinks of the dissolution of ideological blocks in postmodern societies or the liquefaction of organized bodies, orders, guilds, and traditional political parties, of familial and communal bonds, and of the normative institutions that consolidate custom. But these sociological metaphors describe the foundations of normativity as parts of social reality, actually as the supports that make it "rigid."

Yet, the ideal more often than not *opposes* the real: it is, strictly speaking, what the real *should be*, and most often is not. But something that is not as it should be is not a good thing, and something that *is* as it should not be is a bad thing: it is one of the numerous small or large ills that we experience daily—just as we daily experience many good things, from good coffee in the morning to the privilege of enjoying free time or a satisfying job. There are goods and ills of many types, as many as there are things of positive or negative value. In this way, we are connecting the notion of the ideal to that of *value*.

We can, after all, provide a provisional definition of what makes something ideal: it is the set of values that a thing realizes at its best. The notion of value is tied to that of the ideal because in some degree a value always transcends the good that incarnates it. Even the coffee I had this morning was by no means an "ideal" coffee.[18]

But there is no notion that is less clear today, and truly less clear in all of modernity and its philosophical thought, and more obscured by ideological thought, than the notion of value. What is a value? What are values? What constitutes an experience of value? Perhaps what is most important today is recognizing that the word "values" has become the greatest victim of the *skepticism* that, both in and out of academia, confronts philosophical arguments about "ideal" or *eidetic* properties of things.

This mainstream skepticism can only be questioned by giving up the top-down approach characteristic of metaphysics (concerning ideal objects), and, specifically, of metaethics (concerning values): or so I shall argue. We shall have to replace that approach by a phenomenological, that is a bottom-up approach, consisting in a careful examination of what

[18] See Sect. 3 in Chap. 1 for the reasons why the word "value" has a bad press in public debates, and why we should appreciate the "more modest meaning" that classical phenomenology provides for it.

our first-personal experiences reveal to us, once we have "bracketed" what is most frequently meant by "values": namely, evaluative beliefs inherited from tradition or constitutive of a given culture or even projected onto real things by our drives and desires. We shall use the word "value" to refer to a specific sort of data of lived experience, a specific kind of positive and negative quality *that requires new and clear conceptual articulation*—and to nothing else.

This is why we need an extensive exercise of descriptive phenomenology, not only of what is given, but also of some ordinary forms of value-blindness or short-sightedness, before confronting some articulated forms of axiological skepticism. In other words, I am not proposing a line of argument of the form: "if we take seriously what our first-personal experiences reveal to us, then we simply have to endorse the existence of values." I am rather suggesting that we should first get familiar with the very "matter" of what we call a value quality, by letting a value predicate become "filled" with its own intuitive, non-conceptual content (as we can easily do with color terms); and then ask ourselves what it would mean to deny (or to assert) that such a predicate may be exemplified in reality, or what a world without value qualities would be like.

5 Civil Apathy as the Atrophy of Value Experience in the Public Sphere

I would like to exemplify this claim with one value: beauty. Or rather with one disvalue: the destruction and the dissipation of beauty that is currently at work, and astoundingly so, where beauty is relevant to a country's GDP, as is the case in many South-European countries. I choose to discuss beauty, firstly because the *visibility* of beauty and ugliness shows in a concrete way what I mean by the *experience* of value and disvalue. Secondly, because beauty is classically conceived as the "glory" of justice, its visible form, its splendor. A (sensibly modified) version of this classical thesis, which was at the heart of ancient Greek civilization, can be generalized into the theory which in this book I defend: that of *the coherence and consistency of the axiological universe*. As we shall see, this is not at all

a popular theory. Thirdly, and finally, because by its nature as *intrinsic*, non-instrumental value, beauty exemplifies in the most intuitive way what the erosion of *ideality* consists in. Most likely, disvalue-laden facts like the ones I am going to mention concern many countries in the world, so they should be regarded as examples of what ugliness can amount to, and what civil apathy makes possible everywhere.

What it means to destroy cultural heritage alongside with beauty, one can see in *Hands over the City*, the famous 1963 film directed by Francesco Rosi. The story goes on: as in many European countries, it is a story of cement (the soil is being consumed, by some estimates, at a rate of eight meters a second), of great useless construction projects that cut into mountains and disfigure bodies of waters, of highways that destroy fragile landscapes that are celebrated throughout the world. Landscape is afflicted by the systematic destruction of coasts, dunes, and forests, by the mad proliferation of touristic ports, all purely pretexts for frenetic construction, sometimes financed with public money that had been raised to protect coasts from marine erosion. The list could go on.

All of this is apparently of little concern to many Italian citizens (even among those who vote). It is not only that there are other priorities: it is that most do not see or recognize how ugliness corrodes meaning and beauty, how the destruction of the landscape strips it, in a certain way, of its very identity, which is part of our own identity and a "cultural right" that is constitutionally protected.[19] Most of us, it appears, find all this irrelevant.

This widespread indifference to ugliness exemplifies, it seems to me, what I have called a blunting of value experience, or its gradual atrophy. Curiously enough, this atrophied sensitivity does not extend to private goods and ills. It is an indifference that can degenerate into cynicism and the silent support of the worst public policies. After all, demagogues from all over the world have always had the peculiar capacity to tap into the

[19] See Article 9 of the Italian Constitution.

visceral aspects of a widespread mentality,[20] and an atrophy of feeling toward values of one sphere certainly does not inhibit—if anything, it fosters—the vitality of the more basic strata of emotional life, which nourish emotions like anger and fear. Piero Calamandrei (one of the founding fathers of the Italian republic) described the endemic skepticism and conformism concerning public institutions and government as the "heavy burden of our political history." He wrote in 1954:

> The curse that has afflicted the Italian people over the centuries has been […] this schism between people and state, given which the people have felt the state to be a foreign oppression, like a tyranny, like an enemy outside of and above them.[21]

This conviction generates a second claim regarding the nature of public evil that afflicts us. At the base of the erosion of ideality in the sphere of public ethics, we find a generalized loss, or endemic lack, of trust in public institutions.

Today, however, Calamandrei's diagnosis no longer suffices. The past does not fully explain the present. As the fact reported in the above quotation seems to attest, history has moved on, and not only on the Old Continent. To perceive the state—or the law—as a foreign oppressor: this is an apparent feature of a populistic mentality. As if the state itself—or its representatives—completely lost that credible degree of devotion to public service that a state should embody.

Now we can see better, perhaps, what is not persuasive in the *theory* of "banal" evil. This theory does not shed light on what is specific about

[20] During the protests aroused by the murder of the African American citizen George Floyd by a federal policeman, peaceful protesters were physically cleared from around the White House to make way for an appearance by the president, Bible in hand, outside a historic church, on June 1, 2020. On that occasion, retired Marine General Jim Mattis said in a statement published in *The Atlantic* on June 3, 2020: "Never did I dream that troops taking that same oath [to support and defend the Constitution] would be ordered under any circumstance to violate the Constitutional rights of their fellow citizens—much less to provide a bizarre photo op for the elected commander-in-chief, with military leadership standing alongside." Commenting upon this and other, related, facts, Anne Applebaum mentions the behavioral scientist Karen Stenner and her writings "about people who have what she calls an authoritarian predisposition," (Stenner 2005) and concludes that the president "was sending a message to his Americans with an authoritarian predisposition: *I share your identity. I am part of your tribe*" (Applebaum 2020).

[21] Calamandrei 2011, 67.

moral knowledge. The expression "banality" pins down a *reduced level of moral conscience*, as opposed to the lucid and voluntary wickedness of moral perversity. But what reduces conscience is not a generic "absence of *thought*," or an incapacity to distinguish good from evil, as Arendt suggested. It is a complete flattening of the *affective sensibility*, that by which we *perceive* the value qualities of things. That's why words like "apathy" or "indifference" aptly, if not exhaustively, describe this state of moral idiocy. This is the second claim, after the one about the erosion of ideality, of the phenomenology of the cynical consciousness. A "banal" world is thus a flattened world, without upheavals and fault lines, stripped of all the colors and flavors of the axiological experience. How does one get to this point?

The experience of (dis)value is largely an "acquaintance with grief," to quote the almost untranslatable title of a celebrated novel, translated into English as *Acquainted with Grief*.[22] This is well known to anyone who has discovered how precious a person was only after that person is no longer there, or has had to live through the radical readjustment of the proportions of gravity and importance of things and events that mourning involves. The worrisome question is: How are apathy and indifference possible, not to mention the neutralization of the emotive shock, before certain aspects of public evil that shout revenge to the sky?

6 Public Evil and Common Evil

Before attempting an answer, we should clear up a doubt that might arise in a careful reader. Can we speak of "common evil" instead of "public evil"? We can, if we can convince ourselves that this evil that concerns the sphere of public ethics is effectively *a reduction of the value of the life of everyone* (as in the case of the lost beauty of one's country) precisely because some benefit from the violation of other people's rights. That is to say, because *injustice* is increased. And injustice is the worst *common*

[22] "La cognizione del dolore" is the almost untranslatable title of an unfinished novel written in the 1930s by Carlo Emilio Gadda (1969, translated into English as *Acquainted with Grief*), depicting a fake South American Brianza immersed in fascist kitsch and rhetoric. In a way, it is the best inquiry into the banality of evil in its specific Italian variant.

evil, because it reduces the highest value that a society can realize as such, through its institutions, its customs, and the reciprocal behavior of its members: that is, to offer to *each and every person* equal opportunity for personal flourishing.

For there is no good life but for individuals, and for each one in a different way, according to their own identities and their own scales of values. The decision about what to do with one's life cannot be delegated to some authority of collective happiness. But if there is no good life except for individuals, there is no other *common* good than justice, which for individuals is the necessary, if not sufficient, condition for the flourishing of their lives. A very necessary condition since individual happiness is inaccessible to most people in a society where the degree of *public* happiness is too low.

In fact, this is the great common evil: injustice. It is no surprise, then, that Kant illuminates this in a famous proposition, according to which, in a society *completely* deprived of justice, life would no longer be *worth living* for anybody, not even those who might benefit from the injustice. This is the foundation of political liberalism, that philosophy—or better, reason—is able to justify, and that in the terminology of post-Rawlsian political philosophy is epitomized in the formula of the priority of the just over the good.[23] But perhaps the Kantian or Rawlsian argument is not the whole of the story. Can we do better? Can practical reason provide more persuasive arguments?

That such is, in fact, the case will be put in evidence in the sixth and final chapter of this book—towards which, naturally, the whole course of this book is leading.

7 Where Does Public Evil Come From?

Let us return to the flat, axiologically neutral world of civil apathy. How is it possible to get into such a state?

Neutralization or repression, whose mechanisms we know well even in the case of private grief, is not only an object of psychological

[23] Kant 2017 [1797], Introduction.

investigation. It is a fundamental aspect of the dynamic of willing and acting, a power of managing experience. However, this power can also be a source of illusion and self-illusion, which phenomenologists have accurately described.[24]

We have a sort of freedom, which is that of "neutralizing" the motivational weight, or the importance and value of given facts: we may or may not allow ourselves to be motivated by them as life goes forward. In this way, further emotions, actions, and choices that might reasonably follow from the apprehension of a given fact can remain ignored, as happens typically with the repression of mourning. However, when this sort of repression shapes our reasons for action in the public sphere, a peculiar element is often added, namely, the use we often make of arguments of the "lesser evil" type (justifying an act of negative value because a greater evil would follow from its omission). Here we easily fall prey to the axiological ambiguity, which consists of diverting our gaze from the part that is evil and turning it toward the good part, as the turn to reality usually involves: this is what we have called before the "conversion to reality." Apathy or indifference can thus be effects of repression, which, in the final analysis, is always a repression of pain—even of those disturbing aspects of pain that are inflicted on other people.

There is, of course, a vast difference between the private and the public spheres in this regard. That form of daily indifference to evil in public affairs affected the people born in the second half of the last century much less than seems to be the case among the younger generations today. However, little seems to change in the distribution, partly unjust and partly unfathomable, of personal pain and happiness on this earth. In the private realm the experience of value remains very much alive, inseparable from joy and pain and the whole gamut of emotions, feelings, and passions that give intuitive fullness to our valuations—legitimate or mistaken as they may be.

True enough: Italians have a long tradition of "skepticism" or even sheer indifference toward the *res publica*, well attested by their classics: from Dante to Guicciardini to Leopardi to Beccaria to Manzoni. Yet indifference and civil apathy must be growing elsewhere, too, if such a

[24] See De Monticelli 2012, which develops analyses from Scheler 1973 and Stein 2000.

sensitive author as Martha Nussbaum deals precisely with this theme in one of her most successful books, *Political Emotions*. This book deals with the fault that liberal political culture supposedly suffers from: undervaluing the importance of "emotional support for a decent public political culture."[25] Nussbaum also sees that there is a connection between the affective sensibility of citizens and their adhesion to the ethical core of the social contract that constitutes civil life: and she thinks that a solution, something that plays the role of civil religion, an *education of the emotions* that reawakens the love of country, is "necessary" for politics. As she explains:

> I envisage throughout a type of liberalism that is not morally "neutral," that has a certain definite moral content, prominently including equal respect for persons, a commitment to equal liberties of speech, association, and conscience and a set of fundamental social and economic entitlements.[26]

There you have it. But while this study shares with Martha Nussbaum's a concern for the education of the emotions and political ramifications that follow from this, what I want to emphasize is not the pragmatic sense but rather the decidedly *cognitive* dimension of this undertaking. Our two theses about the cynical consciousness—that is, the erosion of ideality and the atrophy of the experience of value—open the road for this.

Our focus will not be on eliciting the right political emotions through education, as in Nussbaum, but on axiological *knowledge*. First of all, we shall investigate and try to bring to light what, across the history of European modernity—the age of rights, with all its glories and tragedies—we have *learned* about justice. But our attention will be focused not only on justice, or on what a just society should be, but rather on the *experience* of values in general. In the second place, we will turn our attention to the matter of the method of the search for and the knowledge of good and evil: the method and the concepts through which the acquaintance with grief becomes a meaningful experience of value, and the

[25] Nussbaum 2013, 8.

[26] Ibid., 16.

meaning of this experience becomes judgment, hypothesis, question, justified true belief.

What we are working towards is an axiology and a theory of axiological knowledge. In the process, we will articulate some of the typical structures of axiological and ethical skepticism, reviewing some of the important skeptical theories that have profoundly marked the intellectual trajectory of the twentieth century—a century that deepened our sense both of tragedy and hope in human history like no other. Finally, and based on the concrete phenomenology of value experience, we shall offer an outline, albeit tentative and provisional, of an axiology and a corresponding episteology of axiological knowledge.

For I believe that we have learned much from the tragedies of the last century, from the "acquaintance with grief," though we have taught it too little. I am not talking so much about the contents of that history, but about the nature of the experiences of value and disvalue themselves and how this engenders knowledge. Now, this equates, more or less, to having forgotten the nature and task of philosophy. This last point is posed best in terms of a question: Where is Socrates today? Where is the study of ideality, or the quiet front of resistance against the realism of force? This is the question we will confront in the next chapter.

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3

Where Is Socrates?

All life is position-taking and all position-taking is subject to an ought, to a verdict concerning validity or invalidity.
—Edmund Husserl, *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*

1 The Disputed Question: What Are Values?

> The concept of value is at the center of philosophy. All reflection bearing on the notion of value and on the hierarchy of values is philosophical; all efforts of thought bearing on anything other than value are, if one examines them closely, foreign to philosophy. For that reason, the value of philosophy itself is beyond discussion. For, as a matter of fact, the notion of value is always present to everybody's mind. Everybody orients his thoughts and his actions towards some good, and no one can do otherwise.[1]

This is how Simone Weil, clear-eyed and impetuous as always, opens an unfinished fragment from her daily reflections in 1941. By this time,

[1] Weil 2014 [1941], p. 105.

R. De Monticelli, *Towards a Phenomenological Axiology*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73983-6_3

Paris had already been under Nazi occupation for a year, a fact that accounts for the peremptory tone of these lines. Peremptory and academically "incorrect," to be sure—even though she points directly to an underlying truth.

The passage cited here expresses a striking awareness of the most disputed question of all modernity, one that has generated the most discordant positions, both between philosophical schools and in open conversations on moral, civic, political, economic, legal, existential, aesthetic, and religious topics. What do we mean by "value"? Are there values? What are they? Do they have any objectivity? In what relation do they stand to facts, judgments, actions? To persons, their experiences, their needs, their culture, and their convictions? To the economic, juridical, and political structure of human societies?

This is anything but an academic question. Life is essentially the experience of value and disvalue—of all the countless concrete goods and ills, small and large, from which we derive pleasure and pain each day. Simone Weil does not address this crucial point quite explicitly enough in the passage cited above. She writes that the notion of value is always present to us because "everybody orients his thoughts and his actions towards some good, and no one can do otherwise."

This may well be true, but in what sense? The text goes on: "Moreover, value is exclusively an object of reflection. It cannot be an object of experience." Now, this is simply not true. That value is a matter of experience is what I in the present book, from its first page to its last, try to show.

Weil has no desire to distinguish her position, here, from that of the long tradition that defines the good as the formal object of desire: *bonum est quod omnia appetunt*, according to the scholastic formulation. But this *primacy of desire and of the will*, this conception of humans as being fundamentally bearers of ends and projects, because they are essentially constituted by desires and aspirations, belongs to a nineteenth-century vision of the world, one that is rooted in post-Enlightenment modernity. Remember Goethe's Faust? He remains unsatisfied with his translation of the opening line of the Gospel of John until he hits upon the solution of substituting (human) action for *logos*, the divine word: "In the beginning was the Act."[2]

[2] Goethe 2003, line 1237.

There is a modern form of "voluntarism" whose canonical philosophical expression is German idealism, but whose life far outstrips the glory days of Hegelian philosophy. Its legacy lives on, as we shall see, in the twentieth-century post-Nietzschean skeptical interpretation of the so-called "fact/value dichotomy." Actually, the only form in which values are taken into account by most philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition is by regarding them as "reasons for action."

But before acting, we are acted upon. We do not learn to act effectively—more generally, to live according to human norms—until we have learned to *adequately respond* to the external and internal stimuli that we're bombarded with from the very first moments of our lives. No matter how this happens, an efficacious agent cannot come to the world before a *subject of experience* emerges from the flux of sensory and affective information and out of the chaos of needs and desires. By "subject of experience" I mean a being who is capable of evaluating potential goods and, especially, impending evils, over and above recognizing more or less correctly the things in its environment. The first part of our life, in other words, is a long apprenticeship in the understanding and appropriation of reality and value. This is an essential, constitutive part of experience and motor development, one that undoubtedly, in some sense, precedes the development of speech.

The central idea of this chapter is that there is a "receptive turn" that should be claimed for axiology, and that this represents *ideality* as a moment of value experience, as can be highlighted by a text from Husserl's famous (1911) article on "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science."[3] The targets of this article are forms of reduction of the ideal to the factual that

[3] This is a very long and dramatic footnote to the text of 1911, containing the sentence that, for this reason, features as the epigraph at the top of this chapter. "The spiritual distress of our age has indeed become unbearable. […] It is […] the most radical vital distress from which we suffer, a distress that leaves no part of our lives untouched. All life is position-taking and all position-taking is subject to an ought, to a verdict concerning validity or invalidity according to claimed norms that have absolute validity. As long as these norms were not disputed, were not threatened and ridiculed by any skepticism, there was only one vital question: how best to satisfy the norms in practice. What are we to do now, however, when any and every norm is contested or empirically falsified and robbed of its ideal validity? Naturalists and historicists fight for a worldview, and yet both work from different sides to reinterpret ideas as facts and to transform all actuality, all life, into an incomprehensible idea-less jumble of 'facts.' The superstitious belief in the fact is common to them all" (Husserl 2002 [1911], p. 290).

were current then and are so still today. This reduction can be understood both in *naturalistic* terms, as naturalizing logical, semantic, and pragmatic norms to mental facts, and in *relativistic* terms, as relativizing moral and legal norms to cultural facts (mainstream philosophical trends have not changed so much since). The "ideality" or normativity in question, though, is no speculative construct, but the boundary *given* to our *receptive* life (*Erleben*), grounding our "positions" and preserving them from arbitrariness. Under "position-taking" Husserl understands our (more or less adequate or "correct," but always corrigible) responses to the givens of the lifeworld. Skepticism about ideality turns out to be skepticism about experience.

Cognition, valuation, and action always belong together. This point cannot be over-emphasized. If Simone Weil is right in saying that "everybody orients his thoughts and his actions towards some good, and no one can do otherwise," it is because our whole life, from morning until night, each and every day, remains essentially the *experience* of good and evil—where "neutral" facts are the exception and not the rule. *Every* experience, even in the most basic of sensory perceptions, is *also* always the experience of value and disvalue. This is true not only of those goods necessary for survival, like a warm room or a good meal, but also those that belong to the aesthetic sphere, to the visible, audible, tangible, and tasteable. Indeed, it is the fact that perceptive sensitivity is also always *axiological* sensitivity that leads to the creation of art—that is, the creation of artifacts that somehow embody this sense of value—wherever there are human beings. This remarkable fact is attested by the latest archeological finds from the most distant past as well as in the most recent psychological research on childhood perception.

Beyond childhood, the most urgent and dramatic part of everyday experience is moral experience, with its demands, conflicts, evasions, enthusiasms, disillusionment, and questioning. And when moral experience takes the form of civic, political, or religious passions—with their corresponding conflicts—resignation, disenchantment, and states of apathy and despair are often the result. Even worse, as we can see in our present situation, a lack of hope and personal investment in the future (especially a shared future) may come to afflict not only the older generations but also—and especially—the young. In its worst forms, this state

fuels fanaticism and fundamentalism, now everywhere in evidence. For this reason, it becomes imperative to bring to light and understand those moments of ideality that are present in our experiences of value, so that they can guide our decisions and mark our approach to the future.

This work of clarification is the ideal role of philosophy—that is, philosophy as exemplified by Socrates. Philosophy was born, at least in Greece and in its Socratic form, precisely in the attempt to throw light on these experiences, to make them objects of study and, so, a means of acquiring knowledge—the knowledge that could guide one's action, practical reason.

But if we look at the century that precedes ours, no aspect of human experience seems to have been left more in the dark by philosophy than the experience of value—at least this is true of the philosophical discourse that has had any impact on the public debates in democratic societies or in research programs and academic discussions around the world.

So, where is Socrates today? Have we made real progress in the dispute between Socrates and Thrasymachus on justice, or in the debate between Socrates and Euthyphro on the nature of the good?

Apparently, Socrates has retreated. And the loss of ideality that I described in the previous chapter is largely our own fault, the fault of we educators who have retreated along with him. Not because we have not taught ideals at all; on the contrary, because we have done so as though ideality were a question of "positing" values, a mere act of the will, and not a practiced exercise of sensitivity, intelligence, and reason—that is, an exercise in the search for truth. Or, even worse, we talk of values as something passively inherited from "tradition"—a word which, along with "the past" and "religion" is frequently associated with the common use of the term "values." But not even this amounts to "meaningful experiences and reliable demonstrations," as Galileo would have it: rather, this is indoctrination.

Socrates is in retreat because too many of the philosophers of recent generations have conceived of ideality either as a cultural heritage (à la Taylor[4]) or as a postulate of the will (à la Korsgaard[5]): as a choice, a

[4] Taylor 1989.

[5] Korsgaard 2009.

decision, a *parti pris*. In the best of cases, ideality is thought of as a social *construction* that involves shared axiological judgments, but certainly not as trial and error or as suffering or *discovery*—in other words, not as the product of personal experience and research.

We educators, whatever our discipline, have in general followed these philosophical trends. If the ruling classes of Europe—even those of the youngest generations, and especially the politicians among them—seem so mediocre and so incapable of raising questions of ends, goals, and real society-wide projects, so desperately devoid of a vision of the future, so miserably habituated to living day-by-day, to obtaining consensus through extortion and the exchange of favors, and to ruling over us with the ongoing blackmail of emergency, part of the blame (and no small part at that) no doubt rests with us, the educators.

2 Socrates' Retreat and the Two Levels of Axiological Skepticism

A democracy is not only a form of government, it is first and foremost a society based on reason—practical reason—and not on religion. The disenchantment with practical reason is axiological skepticism. And the disenchantment with practical reason is the end of democracy.

From a theoretical point of view, this book has axiological skepticism as its polemical target—or rather as its polemical horizon. By *axiological skepticism*, I understand the thesis that value judgments—and thus the practical thought that orients our action in all its spheres—are not subject to questions of truth or falsehood, cannot be the objects of interrogation, research, rational discussion, and verification (at least until the contrary is proven). Value judgments, from this perspective, are irremediably subjective, culturally and historically relative, or, in the best of cases, subject only to a politics of shared agreement through negotiated compromises between different points of view.[6]

[6] This last clause seems to describe the practice of political compromise, but in fact corresponds to the last version of Rawlsian constructivism: "The idea of approximating to moral truth has no place in a constructivist doctrine: the parties in the original position do not recognize any principles of justice as true or correct and so as 'antecedently given': their aim is simply to select the conception

One of the convictions from which this work was born is that there is a kind of continuity and complicity between ordinary practical cynicism of "everyone does it" or "it's normal," which leads to the illogical conclusion "hence, it's right," and the kind of axiological skepticism that is now the mainstream mentality of the professions and educated, academic communities—often at Byzantine levels of sophistication—around the world. Consequently, the retreat of philosophy from the front lines of ideality is not, in my judgment, without fallout regarding the significant loss of public trust in democracy and the declining rates of participation in civic life, widespread in both contemporary Europe and the United States.

The idea underlying this claim of complicity between a low and illiterate level of value skepticism and an academic or cultivated one is that their relationship resembles that which holds between a language and the metalanguage that sets the language rules. Let us exemplify this claim on the basis of two domains of normativity: law and language.

There is a fatal and destructive leap from an action that violates a law to an action that modifies the law in such a way as to render legal or unsanctionable violations of this type. When the constitution itself is interpreted in this way, the very principle that should express the values on whose shared acceptance the pact of citizenship is founded is violated, and this leap is all the more devastating. To bend the law and make it surrender to brute force is something that can take place either directly and intentionally or indirectly, through the most vicious dynamics of democratic politics—the proliferation of norms born from the lowest contingency of existing power relations, from electoral demands, from the most opaque of agreements.

The leap in destructive potential is self-evident, and it is the same leap that exists between a single, isolated lie, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, acquiescing to a use of words that obliterates their meaning and cancels the distinction between true and false language, and ultimately any real discussion. This is well-known to the "ministers of truth"

most rational for them given their circumstances. This conception is not regarded as a workable approximation to the moral facts: there are no such moral facts to which the principles adopted could approximate" (Rawls 1999, p. 564). We shall come back to Rawls's thought in Sect. 6 in Chap. 4 and Sect. 3 in Chap. 5.

who inhabit possible worlds not so distant from ours, with their *newspeak* in which "war is peace," "freedom is slavery," and "ignorance is strength." And in which, of course, "illegality is law"—as in the familiar dystopian novel.

It is very clear which of the two levels of infringements—violating norms and corrupting them—has worse consequences on public and civic life. Corrupting the rules entails deleting the difference between correct and incorrect behavior, or even innocence and crime. Now, wherever norms themselves are being corrupted, there is always someone who has given in and *agreed* to corrupt them: a jurist that bends the norm to allow for vicious practice, a journalist that uses a word uncritically or distortedly, or else employs a phrase in order to obscure a fact. These forms of surrender presuppose a mysterious blurring, in the mind of whoever perpetuates them, of a sense of principled difference between *is* and *ought*, or the real and the ideal.[7] In the case of semantic norms, what is lost is a distinction between conventions dependent on usage, which are variable, and the ideal meaning of words, which contributes to the true and falsity of our judgments.

In the case of legal or constitutional norms, what seems to disappear from jurists' minds is the distinction between political ideologies that respond to determinate wills endowed with power (*rex facit legem*) and ideal principles of justice that are posited as the foundations of the very rules of the political arena (*lex facit regem*). The corruptors of law or language are usually part of the "cultivated" elite, and in both of these cases we see that the arguments used to justify these actions are typically *skeptical* ones: for example, arguments to the effect that journalists cannot truly describe facts objectively, because there are no truths or falsehoods, only interpretations; or arguments to the effect that constitutions are nothing more than the historical expression of determinate power relations, and thus should always be interpreted or modified in keeping with these changing relations of power.

[7] For a very rich comparative collection of such cases, from different times and political contexts, quoting classical analyses by Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* and concluding with an alarming description of contemporary US officials, see Applebaum 2020.

If philosophy were still part of the mental furniture of the ruling classes, everyone would recognize in these skeptical arguments the classical arguments made by Gorgias on truth and falsehood and those made by Thrasymachus on justice. And they would at least not be taken for granted, because we would remember the theoretical paradoxes—and the practical disasters—they lead to. But where is Socrates? In these two domains, that of legal and that of semantic norms, we can see with great clarity how the generalized retirement from Socrates' job has had dangerous consequences for public life. For active "skepticism" at the ruling level becomes cynicism at the level of normal citizenship. Or else, it engenders chronic distrust of the institutions, increasing disloyalty, and the decay of civil society.[8]

Rational debate becomes hard when the "space of reasons" is so "disfigured."[9] It becomes a hard job to confute the eternal Thrasymachus claiming that might makes right. Or, put more subtly, that every value judgment is simply the subjective expression of desires and preferences. A very questionable thesis, if only because it blurs the distinction between actual preference and ideal desirability, and even the distinction we use in everyday life between judgments of taste and moral judgments. If this thesis were true, then judgments of value would *never* be subject to the *jurisdiction* of axiological reason (and thus to doubts as to whether they are right or wrong), but would only be subject, at most, to the strictures of a strategic rationality and, naturally, to the broadly political game of whatever forces are currently at play. This is what most contemporary political commentators seem to believe. And connected to this mainstream skepticism we often find another "conversion to reality" typical of our age: the naturalization of value judgments, according to which

[8] This increase in distrust of democratic institutions and citizenry seems a pretty universal trend in this century—a trend somehow recorded and assumed by popular novelists such as Michel Houellebec and Don DeLillo. The latter answered a critic accusing him of literary vandalism and bad citizenship thus: "We ought to be bad citizens. We ought to, in the sense that we're writing against what power represents, and often what government represents, and what the corporation dictates, and what consumer consciousness has come to mean. In that sense, if we're bad citizens, we're doing our job" (Remnick 1997). Fair enough: but where are the sources of that anonymous "power," if not in "us"?

[9] Urbinati 2014.

axiological reasons are nothing more than the culturally constructed outgrowth of our biological motivations.[10]

Callicles and Gorgias did not present themselves as "philosophers"—but rather as "sophists" or pupils of them—no more so than Euthyphro, a priest. Plato's Socrates refuses to be classified as a "sophist"—by inauguring an opposition with sophistry that will define philosophy. However, many of those considered philosophers today have changed sides and crossed over to Callicles and Gorgias. They have, in other words, "betrayed" Socrates. But "changing sides" and "betrayal" refer, rather, to political or moral categories, certainly not to philosophical arguments. What I think has happened to a large part of both academic philosophy and public debate in Europe during the past century is rather a tendential extinction of that "Socratic" confrontation between philosophy and sophistry that Husserl deemed constitutive of philosophy and "*immer wieder*" (again and again) required in an exercise of philosophy as a method of the examined life, in response to those who deny "any reasonable meaning" to it. Where the Socratic element consists in placing "the fundamental opposition between vague opinion and evidence, governing all wakeful personal life, into the very focus of the ethical concern" (see Sect. 4 in Chap. 5). In other words, if denial of any reasonable meaning to life—the very challenge of the sophist to the philosopher—becomes part of the philosophical mainstream, philosophy itself loses part of its Socratic *raison d'être*: it undergoes an essential change of meaning and role. In this sense, what is at stake in axiological skepticism is not just one philosophical doctrine, but the very nature of philosophy. This is the main claim that I am putting forward under the label "Socrates' retreat."

In fact, Socrates tries, in his discussions about truth with rhetoricians and sophists like Gorgias and Protagoras or about justice with

[10] The tendency that has been dominant for the past half-century, the "naturalization" of the mind, has certainly not spared the axiological realm. I have in mind the research program known as scientific naturalism, rooted in the "naturalized epistemology" of W.V. Quine, on the basis of which the study of knowledge and of justification—hence of reason—becomes simply a chapter of cognitive psychology. Most theories in contemporary analytic metaphysics and philosophy of mind defend either some form of scientific naturalism, where reductionist arguments prevail, or some form of (more or less edulcorated) dualism. Contemporary metaethics, in so far as it is conceived as an ontology and metaphysics of values, largely shares this alternative. We shall touch, albeit marginally, upon this aspect of the metaethical debate in Sects. 2, 3, and 4 in Chap. 6.

Thrasymachus or Callicles, to argue that there is a difference between the real and the ideal, and that the ideal is not a subjective mirage or merely wishful thinking, but rather a recognizable standard of right thinking and right action. Yet this argument cannot be understood as a metaphysical claim, but as part of an ethical form of life, shaped by philosophy and its care for epistemic values. This kind of attempt is what we want to revive, using a language and referring to experiences that are accessible to people today, living in a contemporary environment that is predominantly hostile to value cognitivism.

The latter paragraphs explain why I am referring to Socrates rather than to Plato. In other words, I am talking about that character—whether real or imagined by Plato—who went around asking people *why* they said what they said and did what they did, without letting himself be content with the rather flimsy reasons they usually put forward, but choosing instead to lead them to see the paucity of their evidence and the insufficiency of those reasons. By "Socrates" I intend the one who called his fellow citizens to verify in the first person, *de visu* and not by hearsay, the foundations of their convictions, who called on them to exercise reason as a critical awareness and the search for adequate evidence, always assisting them to take an interest in *their own* good reasons, and not his.

If, with Socrates, we turn our attention to the claim of a difference between the real and the ideal, we will see that this is by no means a begging of the question, to which one posits a counter-position, with no end to the dispute. (What most people think of as a "philosophical dispute" is just that: an intractable argument held in vain.) It is not a dogma, but a *demand* for reasons and evidence: it is a commitment one assumes and a request one makes of oneself and others. It is something we freely entrust to each other. To ask for a reason *is* to distinguish fact from right, what one actually does from what one *ought* to do, what one really believes from what one *ought* to believe: this distinction is a demand, not a dogmatic assertion. To welcome this demand and honor its commitment is to forge with others a way of being together that was, and keeps being, a sort of permanent anthropological revolution: we call it "face-to-face." But this way of being together requires a third element over and above the two parties or partners: an *object*, that can and has to be given as the same for both, in order to make the confrontation of the different

perspectives possible, and reveal the one-sidedness or inadequacies of each one. Intersubjective intentionality necessarily involves objectivity—as opposed to sheer collective intentionality.[11] Such a way is new with respect to what we share with similar social animals in other species, something that is different from simply belonging to a community, be it by origin or acquisition.

3 Face-to-Face and Belonging: Socrates' Lesson and Epistemic Values

The "face-to-face" I have differentiated from mere "belonging" represent two different modes of shared life.[12] Only the face-to-face is an eminently and specifically human possibility, one to which philosophy has given status and discipline. Philosophy is at the origin of the spectacular anthropological experiment that began about 2400 years ago on the squares and streets of Athens. The possibility of democracy depends entirely on it—by which I mean modern democracy as founded on the values of freedom and the equal dignity of persons, *not* the ancient form of democracy, founded on the *demos* or the crowd taken in by charismatic leaders. The scope of philosophy is deeper and wider than that of politics. The grand, largely realized, utopia of modernity itself, expressed by the words "We are the state", depends on this face-to-face. This "we" should not be understood in the sense of group identity, but in that of a dialogue between citizens, a reciprocal asking and giving of reasons, that a deliberative democracy would ideally require. *This* "we" is a legacy we owe to

[11] This distinction is a big advance in social ontology, made possible by phenomenological analysis. Cf. Zahavi 2001 and De Vecchi 2014b.

[12] I introduced and illustrated this distinction in De Monticelli (2013, pp. 65–68). By "belonging" I refer to the relationship of an individual to a community characterized by a low level of individuation and autonomy of its members, or at least of some of them (the case of a family), governed through traditional forms of authority, at least as concerns the activities of the community members as such. In most cases such a community is "natural" or traditional, and membership is not chosen. No group identity qualifies as belonging (for example, an orchestra and a tennis pair do not; relevant communities of this kind resemble what Max Scheler calls *Lebensgemeinschaft* (Scheler 2017 [1923]), and the relations in it resemble what Durkheim calls "mechanic solidarity" (Durkheim 2013 [1902]).

Socrates. It has nothing to do with the "we" that raises its head every time we withdraw from the demanding dimension of the face-to-face in favor of group identity.[13] A faceless head, which reminds us how the loss of a *personal* face—that is, the spontaneous self-abdication of the moral subject in individuals—is the crucial turning point at the origin of public evil. It reminds us of the metamorphosis of the soldier's face in Rosso Fiorentino's painting.

This thesis about Socrates will lead us to a reasoned objection to that part of the liberal tradition that rejects as illusory the philosophical-axiological foundations of politics, reading Platonism as totalitarian inspiration *in nuce*. There is a misconception at the root of this kind of thinking, that of seeing the eminently philosophical discovery of the difference between the ideal and the real as a dogma instead of as a *request* and a *form of commitment* constitutive of a way of being together. Taking this commitment seriously means first and foremost instituting what I called above a society founded on *reason* (and not on religion).

To see this, we must expand on the distinction between the two differing modes of social being that I have called belonging and the face-to-face. I hope this will clear up the confusions that are at the root of an inauspicious and unfounded demonization of the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Elsewhere, I have tried to show what a long road we have had to travel, how many centuries and tragedies we have had to endure, in order to deepen our knowledge of the value of *justice* in ways that go far beyond the limits of Plato's theory of the just society as it appears in his *Republic*.[14] But Plato is also Socrates. And anyway, the discovery of the Socratic face-to-face is what today we would call the axiological discussion *within the space of reasons*. It is the Greek discovery (as far as we know, though nothing *a priori* suggests it could not have been, or was not, produced in any other place) that is not so much the *agora* (and the people in it) as the Socratic use of streets and squares. It is the unheard-of epistemic autonomy of the individual, who detaches himself from various forms of

[13] For a deeper look at the structures of this identity that uses the scientific instruments of generic anthropology, see Cavalli-Sforza and Padoan 2013.

[14] De Monticelli 2011.

belonging (the Platonic scene of the cave, in which everyone is trapped watching their own film), slips away, turns his head in another direction and starts to *seek the truth*, then asks for reasons, argues, tries to *demonstrate* to Thrasymachus that he is wrong, that justice is not the will of the strongest, or to Euthyphro that it is false that goodness is whatever pleases the gods, or to Gorgias and Protagoras that it is not true that there is no truth. He tries to argue and does not always (or maybe does not ever) succeed in demonstrating what he wants to. This is rational discussion, which turns the *agora* into something entirely new with respect to its role in the Athenian democracy, which was in the hands of rhetoricians when it wasn't being controlled by demagogues.

Belonging is characterized not by a face-to-face relation, but by a side-by-side one, so to speak. It has two peculiar characteristics: it can subsist for a member of a given community independently of his or her will (for example by birth or by education), and it can have effects on life that are independent of the person's will or even awareness of those states of affairs and of decisions that affect him or her. This mode of human sociality is, doubtless, the most primitive and original. Typically, we come into the world as part of a community of life without anyone asking us to, and in the same sense we belong, in most cases, to a given linguistic, cultural, or national community, without knowing, for our whole life, how most institutions and artifacts we use actually work. It is also the most fundamental mode, even if it is not the most characteristically human one: on the contrary, one sees it even in those animal societies in which life is socially organized, that is, wherever there is an equilibrium between cooperation and conflict and, thus, there exists a distribution of power. One can conceive of a collective of individuals without the specific modality of the human face-to-face (from ants to bonobos), but one cannot conceive of a collective without some form of belonging or non-individual identity: species, branch, group, nation, language, culture, profession, institution, enterprise.

The basis of the equilibrium between cooperation and conflict is necessarily a kind of distribution of power. It is characteristic of sociality based on belonging that this distribution of power is *not at all* founded on a consensus requested of its members, but only on their tacit, voluntary, or

forced acquiescence (which, insofar as it is voluntary, has its virtues and its vices: loyalty, fidelity, solidarity, and their opposites).

This is a point that has not been taken sufficiently into account by ancient and modern forms of communitarianism, and perhaps even by some of the recent work done in social ontology:[15] namely, that individuals do not live as moral subjects *before* emerging from their original communities, but *after*. Once they have emerged from these communities, however, they free themselves of them and potentially dissolve them.[16] After all, who would want to give up on the chance to be an adult?

We do not exist as independent moral subjects *before* these communities, in which we are subject, in our long neoteny until adolescence, to a learning process of language, reality, and values outside of which no one would be able to individuate him or herself from another as a sensible, voluntary, and reasonable agent. Reasonable agents are not only personal and nonreplicable, but have also an identity that embodies the *universally* shared dispositions of humans in a very particular way: as a native of a language and a culture, with a normative structure proper to him or her, and with a corresponding axiological order—that is, as the bearer of a particular *ethos*. One cannot grow up and become an individual except by *emerging* from a community of shared life.[17]

But for humans there is a further possibility, an anthropological possibility—one that is certainly not a necessity—that remains in the minority among history's populations, even if it is universally accessible. This possibility is precisely that of living an examined life or exercising the

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[15] See Chap. 2, note 15.

[16] Cf. Durkheim's opposition between a "collective identity" based on "intragroup solidarity of belonging, with shared sentiments and beliefs invoking sacred values, whose violation constitutes sacrilege" and "the unity deriving from the shared identity with the reciprocity and mutual commitment *that can exist despite disparate and sometimes conflicting differences of identity*" (S. Lukes, *Introduction* to Durkheim 2013 [1902]).

[17] Durkheim's opposition (see note 16 above) is only diachronic. However, more archaic forms of social interaction subsist in any "modern" society. What is essentially missing from Durkheim's sociology becomes a central feature in the social ontology developed by classical phenomenology: namely, the not only diachronic character of the opposition between archaic, collective-consciousness based, and "modern", face-to-face based type of social interaction, and their synchronic coexistence within society. Max Scheler, in particular, distinguishes between four forms of coexisting social unities—from the more "anonymous" to the more "person-based": the mass, the life-community (*Lebensgemeinschaft*), the "society," and the spiritual personal community. Cf. Scheler 1973 [1916], pp. 519–561; 2017 [1922], pp. 96–129.

critical examination of the ethos in which one is formed. It is the capacity to emerge out of an original community as an individual in the strong sense: that of *autonomy*. This possibility cannot come to light where the face-to-face is not already in some way a habitual dimension of sociality. It is, in effect, a face-to-face with oneself, from which a person emerges transformed: if that person does not reject but rather assumes the ethos of the community of origin, or part of it, this time he or she does so *freely*, making it *his or her own*.

Kant's moral philosophy, ultimately, gave voice to this great possibility, which shines with the light of the Enlightenment. But his *sapere aude*, which in a sense overcomes that of Socrates with all the greatness of the modern notion of liberty, on the other hand reduces its ambition, not recognizing any right to the hunger for new *knowledge* that we feel even with respect to good and evil. Kantian ethics gives us a formal criterion of moral evaluation for our reasons and motivations, but it does not throw light on the *always new* experience we have of good and evil, and does not indicate how to make it the basis of evidence for judgment, how to found on this basis our moral knowledge, how to extend, correct, and deepen it. It excludes the possibility that *bearers* of value—"material determinants of the will," actual goods and ills—might furnish us with moral reasons.

In Socrates, however, we find one perdurable contribution to philosophical thought that goes even beyond the Kantian "*sapere aude*": that of defining the very demand for clarity and awareness, reason and justification, whatever its subject, as an *ethical* demand. That no opinion should, if endorsed, be left without a request for evidence and justification: this "ethics of belief" makes philosophy itself, in the etymologic sense of the word, the universal ethics, or rather, the form of life of a society "grounded on reason." This is, as we shall see (Sects. 4 to 6 in Chap. 5), the Socratic legacy as taken over in Husserl's phenomenology.[18]

[18] For a thorough discussion of the ethics of belief, and a bright confrontation with adverse trends in twentieth-century philosophy, see Engel 2019. Engel starts from William Kingdom Clifford's famous 1877 essay on "The Ethics of Belief," arguing for the ethical obligation to look for evidence for any belief one entertains, or avoids entertaining. But, in a sense, this is already what philosophy essentially is for Socrates, or such is Husserl's reading of Socrates' legacy.

Kant—and the Enlightenment—repeated the defining move of Greek ancient philosophy, and made it effective within Christianity: they entrusted ethics to the "jurisdiction of reason" and detached it from that of religion or tradition, from the ethos or the *mores* of a given society or culture.

A "Socratic" ethical legacy—or its phenomenological renewal—however, goes even beyond that. On the one hand, it places the epistemic values on top of all educational values, promoting axiological and theoretical research, in all fields, as the ever new cognitive foundation of all the normative disciplines (such as law, medicine, engineering, architecture, the arts); on the other hand, it calls morality itself to *cognitive exploration*, grounding moral duty on moral *knowledge*, that, as we shall see, presupposes axiological cognitions in all the spheres of value—since it discovers the correct order of value priority in each given situation.

The consequences of a "Socratic" axiological cognitivism that classical phenomenology rediscovers on its own reach very far. Husserl would call philosophy itself *the ethical form of life*,[19] philosophy being, essentially, the examined life, led by the universal demand of verification not only for any belief (one's own or an alien one), but for the adequacy of any single intentional state, whether doxastic, conative, or affective, as we shall see in the next section.

I shall conclude this section by discussing a special form of the face-to-face modality of social life that the Socratic legacy, so understood, had made possible, and that axiological skepticism threatens, as soon as it attacks epistemic values. This special form is the rational form of the axiological argument, making value disagreement possible—as opposed to value conflict—and civil discord.

Among Plato's Dialogues, *Euthyphro*, as is well known, opens the way to axiological cognitivism, as opposed to voluntarism. This, in any case, is the sense of the question posed by Socrates to Euthyphro on the nature of what is "holy" or deemed good: Is it good because it pleases the gods, or does it please the gods because it is good? Only in the second event, of course, is it the case that actions, situations, and things are intrinsically good or evil. Only in the second case can they embody and exemplify

[19] Husserl 1989 [1923], p. 29.

qualities of positive or negative value: corrupt habits, brave actions, beautiful bodies, regardless of whether or not there are gods and whether or not they care about us, and regardless of the opinions of those who claim to represent them on earth. And, thus, the normative structures of a society, from its costumes to its laws, are completely independent of the will of the gods or their representatives. In this line of thinking, theocracies and hierocracies become unimaginable. But these normative structures, including laws, are *especially* subject to the jurisdiction of our reason, that is to say, to the question that Socrates raised incessantly toward his fellow citizens, actual and aspiring political agents included: Why do you do what you do? Is it right? Or rather: is it done as it ought to be done, in each and every respect? Is the theoretical or axiological conviction that claims to sustain your act true? Is it well-founded? Why do you say what you say? If you deem it to be true, can you show me where to look so that I can see it that way, too? Where is the evidence for all this?

In this new way of living that was inaugurated by Socrates, what becomes equally unimaginable—or rather ethically reprehensible—is the often morbidly self-satisfied shrug of the shoulders that tends to accompany claims about the fate of the West, or the indefinite increase of the will-to-power, the technique, bio-political power, and universal machination, to evoke some of the most popular catchphrases from the post-Heideggerian and the post-Foucauldian arsenals, that we shall critically explore in Chap. 5, Sects. 1 and 8–10. Any teacher of philosophy in the "continental" departments knows how easily students can fall under the spell of such thrones and dominations accompanying that sort of Wicked God of History, "the West."[20] Their critical resistance to the bombast and hollowness of such catchphrases as evoked above can be very feeble.

[20] I refer here to the Heiddegerian legacy, in any of its national variants. One might quote the so-called "Italian Theory" (see Gentili 2012), although one can ask if, beyond the illiberal character of the authors' political realm (Mario Tronti, Toni Negri, Massimo Cacciari, Giacomo Marramao, Roberto Esposito, and Giorgio Agamben), there is truly a unifying thread (for the most widely read work see Agamben 1998). But an analogous criticism should be addressed to the so-called "French Theory" of the "*anti-Lumières de gauche*", starting from Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, going on with the "post-humanist" stance of Claude Lévi Strauss and Louis Althusser, finally rejoined, although with some elements of novelty, by post-colonial thought. We shall confront the intellectual sources of this critique of modernity and the Enlightenment in Chap. 5, especially Sects. 1, 7, and 8–10.

They quickly dismiss any request for reasons, if nobody teaches them about the *epistemic values* of semantic definiteness, conceptual clarity, denotative power, required for words to have truth conditions. Required, that is, for that *responsibility in the use of language* that ought to be the first professional virtue of philosophers, and part of the responsibility each of us has for the construction of our human home: a civil cohabitation on this earth. Now this line of argument, according to which actualizing epistemic values *essentially* defines philosophy, has been typically (and without arguments) rejected and scorned by mainstream "continental" philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century (see Chap. 5).

Giving up the Socratic request for reasons *even in philosophy* seems to be an extreme form of self-abdication of the moral subject, with the excuse of a universal machination run by the powers of the financial capital or the technique, and responsible for everything.

We shall close this section with a last and most paradoxical example, illustrating this refusal of the Socratic request for justification in legal philosophy. It is hard to believe, but in one national variant, the "conversion to reality" has officially reached the domain of the law: not only in practice, as we saw in the preceding paragraph, but also in theory, with the work on "legal nihilism" by a renowned Italian scholar—recently translated into French. The core purpose of this book consists precisely in the suppression of the distinction between the normative and the factual in the domain of legal philosophy. And since suppressing a distinction is always a bit coarse, while suppressing a dualism seems to many to be a virtue, it is worth citing:

> the surest and firmest character [of legal nihilism] is in *the end of any dualism*, of those antitheses, distinctions, and alternatives that have marked all of juridical history.[21]

[21] Irti 2017 [2004], p. 18. For a perplexed review of the book, see Sponchiado 2019.

4 Ethics and the Search for Knowledge: A First Look at the Gift of Bonds

The deconstructive wave came from afar: "deconstruction is justice," wrote Derrida in the 1990s.[22] Twenty years before, Chaim Perelman had already absorbed juridical ideality into anything that is at the service of rhetoric: "judiciary logic […] is entirely centered not on the idea of truth but on that of adherence."[23] At this point, we have seen a sufficient number of examples of the explicit rejection of Socrates' lesson. Let us then go on expounding this lesson, where "Socrates" stands in for a type of philosophy—and I think of Husserl's XXth century's Socraticism—that still keeps watch on the frontlines of ideality.

There are two great discoveries in this lesson. The first is that there is an implicit, silent claim of validity to *everything* we do—a commitment to "rightness"—and particularly in our assertions, which *count* as claims to truth (and as manifestations of our beliefs: in fact, as Moore pointed out by his famous paradox, I cannot say, "it is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining" any more than I can intelligibly say "it is raining, but it is not true that it is raining." Unlike the latter statement, the former is not semantically contradictory. It only infringes a pragmatical presupposition: what one states involves a commitment to truth by the speaker. Without this presupposition, we could not lie: lying is only possible against this backdrop). The second discovery is that these commitments to validity are only claims, that they "require" *justification* or, in other words, are subject to our asking for reasons. In particular, our assertions *require* good reasons, reasons that are sufficient to account for the claim and that are, in principle, accessible to anyone. In short, we have to *show* to others the *evidence* on the basis of which we *recognize* them as true. And this is the definition of *knowledge* (justified true belief) that, notwithstanding any aporias, we still use today. To sum up: (1) a basic form of ideality (validity claim) is embedded in any act; (2) epistemic reasons are just a subclass of reasons for actions. Plato's definition of knowledge narrows down the

[22] Derrida 1992.

[23] Perelman 2010 [1976], p. 260, my translation.

required justification to the case of beliefs and judgments, but the request of justification concerns acts of any sort, even more primarily, in a Socratic vein. Practical reason primes. These two points extend the claim of validity implicit in assertions to acts generally (not only speech acts). This generalization, that we owe to Husserl, needs to be explained.

Speaking and making assertions are only some of the things we can do. There are many other things we do, and almost all of these are subject to questions of justification. The implicit claim to rightness will unfold as opportunity, efficacy, utility, beauty, or even justice, depending on the type of action that is performed, the context, and the aspect for which justification is required: and undoubtedly asking for the reasons for a *harm* inflicted immediately also calls for justice against him or her who inflicts it. In each of these cases, an acceptable justification is distinguished from a pseudo-justification, like the kind with which hypocrisy arms itself—hypocrisy, which, just by virtue of existing, recognizes this demand for reasons. Ultimately, an acceptable justification for an action will have to *show* that its result is a good and not an evil, or a good greater than the harm it might cause. Thus, there is a request for *truth* and a search for *knowledge* here, too. Even those who look for justice in court are not happy with the court pronouncing "their" truth—they want truth to be established, period. Ethics presupposes logic. Even in the demand for cognitive justification, value is at play, if knowledge has more value than unfounded opinion, ignorance, and error. Logic presupposes ethics. This might seem a vicious circle: however, it can also be seen as the "inner" or essential, "eidetic" link defining philosophy, or the unity of practical and theoretical reason. One of the deepest phenomenological discoveries concerns, indeed, the very essence of "philosophical" thought, that cannot be clearly expressed otherwise than in *axiological* terms: philosophy shapes the ethical form of life if and only if philosophers freely let themselves and their freedom be constrained by the bonds of rationality, that is by values: first and foremost, by *epistemic* values. This discovery allows us to provide a technical definition of "sophistry," as the deliberate refusal to respect the epistemic values by subjecting one's statements to the rules grounded on them (such as semantic and pragmatic non-contradiction, univocal use of terms, delimiting the extension of predicates, in short, assuring truth conditions to sentences).

Philosophy or sophistry? As we shall see in Sects. 8–10 in Chap. 5, this is the very question at stake in one of the greatest scandals that ever occurred in the history of philosophy at a planetary level: whether practicing or teaching a form of "thought" that explicitly and voluntarily breaks the bonds of logic and those of ethics—by giving up both responsibility towards the truth conditions of one's speech acts and respect for the listener's (especially, the learner's) inceptive access to the exercise of reason—can still be called "philosophy," and taught as such.[24]

These two "Socratic" discoveries allow for a further generalization: *every* lived experience and every instant of life is subject to question, to critical doubt, which asks whether it is right or wrong and seeks evidence for believing it right. A perception can be illusory. A memory can be faulty. An emotion can be inappropriate. A desire can be misdirected. The same is true of a decision, a passion, an action. To sum up: (3) ideality as a kind of oughtness is embedded in any state, whether doxastic, affective, or conative. All of them are liable to become an "examined life."

The only acts that seem to detach themselves from this *jurisdiction of reason* that rules over our lives are those of the imagination. But the theory of reason that better exemplifies the Socraticism of the phenomenologists not only includes the life of the imagination, it even confers on it a privileged position.[25]

Imagination touches with its hand, so to speak, the gift of bonds or the constraints given to our will, *bonds of which all ideality consists*. We can desire terrible things, perceive the nonexistent, have invented memories. We are even free to do so, against any request for reasons. But we cannot

[24] The reference is to the worldwide debate which exploded after the publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*: where what really challenges the Heideggerian legacy is not so much Heidegger's endorsement of anti-Semitism and Nazism, a long-established fact, but the axiological nihilism underlying it—or so I will argue (see Sects. 8–10 in Chap. 5).

[25] The Husserlian doctrine that we are using, however informally, characterizes every mode of consciousness, from perception to thought, from emotions to decisions, as an activity of "position-taking" that is subject to doubt, hesitation, and correction. Without the "positionality" that characterizes the life of the mind, we would not be "reasonable" animals. Cf. Husserl 2012 [1913], *Ideas I*, §§ 110–114. The discovery of the truth-commitment by the speaker of any statement, on which background not only lying but also fiction are possible, was made by Husserl in his *Lectures on Ethics and Value Theory 1908–14* (Husserl 1988) quite independently of Moore (Moore 1993). The "interweaving" of logic and ethics is also argued for in those lectures that offer an amazing refutation of "practical scepticism", or skepticism about ethical norms.

imagine the unimaginable: something that *breaks the laws of the visible*, as Escher ingeniously demonstrated. In a drawing or a painting typical of his style, our perception of what is depicted in it remains unstable; we are not able to "bring unity" to what is given, making it into a coherent object or scene. Escher shows us the omnipresent yet unobserved presence of constraints on the possible variations of the visible.

Under these constraints or bonds, we are free to imagine anything, without anyone asking us whether it is wrong or right, whether it exists or not. Imagination is, after all, our way of representing for and to ourselves the possible variations of any content whatsoever. Let us take axiological content, for example. To what degree can human behavior vary and still remain *friendly*? How much can the proportions of a face change, and still preserve its *beauty*? As we will see in the last chapter, and as any reader can see for him or herself, the constraints or bonds themselves allow us to recognize friendship and beauty in the surprising variety of behaviors that we have deemed friendly or beautiful. They have nothing to do with choice, for they are given: the *gift* of these structuring constraints is the gift that we always find anew when we do not renounce the distinction between real and ideal, between what wins out and what, in reality, remains a mute but no less sensible *demand*.

5 The Poisoned Reserve

As we have seen, the distinction between the real and the ideal is not a dogma, but a demanding commitment, that of living an "examined life" in virtually every moment. It is a perennially critical awareness, one that can transform every instant of one's life into a moment of exploration and discovery. If we are in dialogue with a priest, where what is in question is what is sanctioned as good, we discover that we can even ask God for reasons, if we agree that ethics is the asking for reasons and the justification for each and every moral imperative. If we are in dialogue with a politician, where the question is what is right in view of the public interest, or just, we discover that the will of those in power is by no means a good reason for a law to exist: a good reason can only be the well-founded truth of a judgment, and thus the deeper knowledge of the value on

which it is founded (justice) or the ideal of a society that would realize it (the just society).

With this, we have concluded the argument against the Straw Man that certain liberal thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper have made of Plato and more generally of the axiological foundation of politics.[26] After all, in the *Republic*, it is a Platonic Socrates who tries to confute Thrasymachus or Callicles. And there is no doubt that the Platonic theory of justice goes astray insofar as it does not include, among the components of a just society, the freedom of persons to renounce their belonging to a particular *status* or social class: you are the head or the heart or the stomach of society, you are either intellectual, warrior, or merchant, and depending on what you are, you will have different virtues, as long as you do not trouble the "harmony" which justice consists in. But, in Popper-like fashion, Plato himself *with his errors* furnishes a way forward, toward critique and cognitive progress, because he has set practical thought on the path of asking for justification, having placed "anyone" at the center of the demand for justice ("what is owed to all") and of the universal foundation of rights.

It is this universalist principle that forms the ideal basis of the face-to-face, which is characterized by the principle of personal responsibility and by the demand for verification. Each person answers in the first person for one's own saying and doing, each person is bound by the recognition of the state of affairs, verified by sufficient evidence, at least until the contrary is proven. That a strange Athenian went around "like a gadfly" asking questions and demanding answers in the first person appeared to be a novel thing, one that enchanted many, but also irritated many others to the point of hatred, calumny, pillory—as still happens today. In this sense, we can say that philosophy has "instituted" the ethical-logical discipline of the face-to-face as a new possibility, which was not present before—an anthropological experiment that is still underway and consists in extending, as much and as broadly as possible, the way of living and interacting in the face-to-face, in increasing its proportion, as opposed to mere belonging, to *all* levels of shared life.

[26] Popper 2013 [1945]; Berlin 1969. We shall discuss more particularly Berlin's views in Chap. 3.

This does not mean that the world of the face-to-face does not also host every possible violence and every possible lie, over and above our immense cognitive fallibility: it only means that, precisely because violence, deceit, and error are so widespread, everyone is called either to question them or to be become complicit with them. It is the space of the demand for reason and justification, the space of the question: Why? The responsibility of justice is given to everyone. That is to say: it is up to us to hold firm the distinction between the ideal and the real, between the always-new contents of discovered right things to say or to do and the actual behaviors of the other players. Violence, deceit, and error can prevail in our relations, but if it is clear to every reasonable person that my request for a reason has not been answered, logic and ethics are safe. Ideality remains, and so does the hope for a better future. By the same standard, the very heart of (penal) justice is the ascertainment and the accessibility of the ascertained truth, not the punishment.

This is why those who have a professional role in the management of the independent "agencies of truth"—the professionals of the media, of education and research, and custodians of the law—are so precious for a modern democratic society. Yet, when they bend the ideal to the real, they poison the well of ideality for a better future, which is all that remains when public evil is emerging victorious all around us. The real tragedy, though, is the corruption of philosophy itself, which is the very gesture of distinguishing between the ideal and the real.

6 Hopelessness: And the "Code of Silence" of Conscience

If the *conceptual content* of the disenchantment with reason is axiological skepticism, an attitude of the mind which is known in all ages, there is an affective *quality* of this disenchantment that seems to be peculiar to our present condition. It is a blend of hopelessness and mistrust that we sense is widespread in Europe at the present, but especially among the young. The word that captures the affective tonality of this apathy and indifference is not quite "despair," the sentiment that names the definitive loss of

what is most precious for an individual, a sentiment that as such is as intimate and personal as there is, and is often connected to a sense of one's own existential failure. The loss of hope to which I am referring instead concerns the *minimal conditions* for hoping for an existential flourishing, whether for oneself or for others.

We see the new generations—especially in European countries that suffered economic crises the longest—sometimes deprived of the very chance to become autonomous, to afford the discovery that each person is called to make of herself, of her talents, of her vocation. It is an almost collective state of mind, which seems to correspond to a loss of trust in the meaning of one's own work (for those who have work) or one's studies (for those who are still immersed in them or see them end with no apparent connection to a possible job); a loss of hope in the future of this European society. The great Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi already lamented a lack of "public faith" as constitutive of Italian society.[27] Loss of faith in institutions is much more than lack of trust in a particular political ruling class or in the way in which things are currently managed. It is a loss of trust in our own capacity for renewing them: also owing to the ever-greater limits of the mechanisms of representation in democracy (and in ours especially). It is a loss *of that trust and reciprocal respect* that is the very essence of the social contract; without forgetting that the first great and implicit "pact" is the language we all use, that is, the pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic bonds that it makes available for the words we use, such that we can reciprocally understand and believe what we say.

Hopelessness is the condition experienced by those who have lost a sense of the future because they have lost all reserves of ideality. In many European societies there is a frightful regression in the *life of reason*—that is, of the *everyday face-to-face*—within all communities of life, work, administration and governance, public institutions, from schools to universities, from hospitals to banks, and so on through all the levels of political organization existing within a nation, starting with its political parties. The complicit silence, the anonymity of the faction, and the "liberty of servants"[28] gradually replace the exercise of first-person

[27] Leopardi 2008 [1823], pp. 63–65.

[28] Viroli 2011 [2010].

responsibility and the demand for truth and justice. Likewise, the distribution and exercise of power are less and less subject to the consensus and control of the citizens.

But wherever this happens, "politics" is dissociated from ethics and even logic. The space of reasons is separated from that of power. As a result, institutions become devoid of sense.

How could trust in institutions deaf to the demand for truth, which is the very core of the demand for justice, survive anyway? Norberto Bobbio points out that among the failures of democracy there is its incapacity to keep faith with one of its "ideal" promises, that of being the regime of visible power, which puts an end to state secrets.[29] Italy is truly a country of missed revelations and catharses, where the promise of transparency has been, from 1945 to the present day, violated ever increasingly and systematically. But what about the other European countries? Reading a memoir by Tony Judt,[30] one of the most significant historians of our times, does not leave much hope that things are that different elsewhere.

To truly see the effects of this hopelessness, we have to focus anew on the first constitutive summons of philosophy in its Socratic key: "know thyself." And to do so we lift an image from a book that has as its theme this eluded question of truth. It is a beautiful book, both of history and of public ethics, and deals with the massacre of Piazza della Loggia in Brescia, Italy, which remained devoid of judicial truth for 41 years, despite three separate trials.[31] The image on which I would like to linger is taken from the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, on which the author, Benedetta Tobagi, comments on in the conclusion of her book. In this passage, one finds the judgment of the dead, placed on the scales of the god Anubis. Only one whose heart is as light as a feather will achieve salvation. Does this mean an innocent, pure heart? Anything but:

> The Hebrew retributive horizon and the image of God as judge capable of penetrating the secrets of the soul of the sinner, even if he refuses any

[29] Bobbio 1987 [1974], p. 76.

[30] Judt and Snyder 2013.

[31] Tobagi 2013. Only in July 2015 was the trial brought to a close with two definitive sentences "of great significance," which confirmed the responsibility of the secret service in collaboration with a far-right organization; see Tobagi 2015. In English, cf. Ginsborg 2003.

> charge of responsibility, as Cain first did toward his brother, are as yet to come. The tribunal of Egyptian souls exhibits in its ferocious nudity a more realistic and troubling psychological mechanism […] The heart, in fact, reads the writing on the wall and could speak, but the ritual formula of the *Book of the Dead* guarantees that it will hold back from revealing facts that might compromise its owner.[32]

Here is what we might call the "code of silence" of self-consciousness.[33] It is undoubtedly a mode of being that is more archaic than subjection to the "image of God as judge"—but also, and especially, I would say, quite incompatible with the anthropological project inaugurated by the invention of philosophy. For the latter, in its Socratic key, is fundamentally the *search for* transparency in one's conscience. Know thyself.

There is a clear connection with that other frontline of philosophy, that of ideality. Let's look at it.

None of the acquisitions of civilization are definitive; there is nothing that the past has handed down that the present cannot squander. It is true, we are the animal species that brings radical novelty into the world: language, laws, civilizations, and cultures, with all their normative structures and ideal meanings. But there is nothing irreversible in these acquisitions. Not just in the banal sense that a catastrophe could easily return us to primitive life or that, sooner or later, terrestrial civilization will come to an end: but in the less trivial, more concrete sense that, even where there subsist real structures and materials of civilization, what is always in danger is their ideal sense, their "spirit." Because *all* the real structures of civilization are emptied of meaning if this spirit is not renewed with and through the life of every newborn child and in every moment of the life of each individual.

Every day we see that this loss of meaning has, indeed, taken place. A democracy becomes empty not only when its mechanisms of representation but also the very capacity that a political class has of truly representing parts of the citizenry fails. A constitution is emptied of sense when it is constantly violated. Money and power are emptied of sense when they no longer serve as the means of distributing wealth and performing tasks for

[32] Tobagi 2013, p. 416.

[33] "Omertà"—translated as "code of silence"—is the reticent attitude or affected ignorance that—typically—characterizes members of mafias or of mafia-ruled populations, out of complicity or fear.

the betterment of all, and instead become ends unto themselves. A political party is emptied of any sense of association, of any political representation, of values and interests, when its sole aim is to reproduce itself. Public language becomes a mishmash of commonplaces and lies when it becomes public only by conforming to the logic of belonging. And so on.

We are like ancient Egypt in the passage above. There is no history or memory that holds, there is no moral progress, unless there are those who here and now renew, with the experience of evil endured, the cognition of suffering and the value that is inseparable from it. These are the persons who keep the idea of catharsis, and with it the idea of the judge within us, truly alive—certainly not just being the cultural heirs of the ideas. A lived experience of these ideas has to be renewed, that is, literally *made new*, by each passing generation. Thus, we have but one resource: the injustice suffered or seen inflicted, insofar as we know how to derive from it an actual knowledge of what justice is. Every search in this direction is part of a battle waged in each and every moment. Ancient Egypt is not the origin, it is the unmoving ground of inner opacity with which, in reality, each one of us *can* coexist.

It is illusory to believe that one can easily preserve a depth of interior and personal private life when—along with trust in public affairs, or rather with regard to the first public affair, which is our language—even that indispensable minimum of trust and mutual respect, which, we have said, is the very essence of the social contract, is lost.

In this sense, there is a lesson that comes directly from the past, a tragic past. A few great writers and thinkers have taught us about the "captive mind,"[34] the surprising capacity for self-censorship that, under a totalitarian regime, extends the act of the self-abdication of the moral subject through a daily habit of opaqueness and lying, even between intimates, and especially with oneself. Just so. But one can still revolt against this kind of "silencing" of self-consciousness, precisely because terror makes evident the violence one undergoes when one is "constrained" to lie, day in and day out: it is harder and harder to "not notice." Terror can keep alive, at least partly, the knowledge of one's own bending, the pain and humiliation of bending to another's will. This is how Solzhenitsyn describes the decision that he and his wife made one day, to stop lying, no matter what the consequences.

[34] Miłosz 1953.

Commenting about this memory, Jeanne Hersch, one of the great Socratic voices of the twentieth century, notes that:

> In the countries where there is real constraint, which is exercised on real freedom, where it is a question of risking something essential, this freedom cannot be worn out. This is why we notice in the dissenters from East Europe a sense of liberty infinitely more radical than ours.[35]

We can understand this statement in the sense that the "heroic" path always remains open, not in the sense that most people remain necessarily aware of the interior servitude to which they can be reduced. The fact that one can lose this painful awareness is attested to by the countless pages on the theme of the "captive mind" of totalitarian ideologies penned by Czesław Miłosz[36] and Vasily Grossman. Grossman, for example, writes about the belated torments of Nikolay Andreevic, cousin of the protagonist of *Forever Flowing*, who after Stalin's death suddenly realizes the truth:

> He had learned to pretend to himself so well, so skillfully that nobody, not even he himself, had noticed that he was pretending.[37]

And Tzvetan Todorov goes further, when he speaks no longer of fiction but of a true, innocent illusion, that he recalls sharing, as a youth, with the native subjects of a totalitarian state:

> our passionate discussions of all manner of elevated subject, often lasting well into the night, gave us the illusion of freedom. Doubtless we were still too young to understand that the boundary between private and public was neither fixed nor impermeable and that, by believing that we had escaped totalitarian control over at least one part of our lives, we were giving the state free reign to regulate our social existence, which is to say, our lives as a whole.[38]

With these experiences and testimonials, I want to draw a contrast. For our purposes, a comparison with the *totalitarian* state is certainly not

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[35] Hersch 1986, pp. 45–46.
[36] Miłosz 1953.
[37] Grossman 1972, p. 35.
[38] Todorov 1997, p. 130.

favorable to us, citizens, as we are, of the *impunitarian* state[39]—no matter how much better we may come off in other respects. This is because interior freedom, which may be illusory, which may be taken away so as to expose its loss, or which may be won back at the risk of one's life, remains in some ways the alternative that defines, negatively, painfully, its own absence.

But when the mind is neither imprisoned by ideology nor subjected to terror, when, on the contrary, it has freely shirked the responsibility of distinguishing the true from the false, the just from the unjust, and the ideal from the real, when these distinctions fall from language itself, when not only the past is deleted from memory, but the very difference between opinion and truth, or between victims and executioners, when the very *question* of truth ultimately disappears, how can one still dissent from others, dissent from oneself, and discover oneself enslaved to the opinion that won the day? How can one even ask oneself the question?

In conclusion: the opacity of public life can become the opacity of private conscience, and the regression of the face-to-face into the anonymity of the faction (even that of blurs and hate speech on social networks) can itself bring about the progressive disappearance of the experience of being face-to-face with oneself: the silencing of conscience. And this process of the self-defacing of interior freedom seems more radical and irreversible than ideological or political captivity, because it deconstructs the meaningful and structuring constraints on freedom: in other words, ethics and logic.

But if this analysis is accurate, then hopelessness and the widespread perception that the future has been stolen show themselves as rooted much less in the economic sphere than is commonly believed and much more, let us emphasize, in the sphere of ideality. Or, more precisely, in the realm of *negated ideality*.

If this analysis is correct, then our culpability as educators and intellectuals for having retreated from our commitment to the distinction between reality and ideality must be taken quite seriously. We have hindered the younger generations from developing self-knowledge, and,

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[39] Author's note: the word *impunitario* is as unusual in Italian as *impunitarian* is in English. But the play on words is intended, so the locution has been retained.

consequently, their hopes for a just society that passes from one generation to the next: all this vanishes along with the articulate awareness of what ought to be and what ought not to be. Such would be the responsibility of a form of philosophy that has abandoned the Socratic way.

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4

The Normative Embodiment of Practical Reason

There is a line among the fragments of the
Greek poet Archilochus which says:
"The fox knows many things,
but the hedgehog knows one big thing."
—Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*

1 An Injection of Ideality into the Foundation of Politics

This book defends a large and old philosophical thesis: the unity of value. [...] Its title refers to a line by an ancient Greek poet, Archilochus, that Isaiah Berlin made famous for us. The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Value is one big thing. The truth about living well and being good and what is wonderful is not only coherent, but

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mutually supporting: what we think about any one of these must stand up, eventually, to any argument we find compelling about the rest.[1]

These words were originally published in 2011, exactly 70 years after the lines of Simone Weil that opened the previous chapter. They appear at the start of *Justice for Hedgehogs*, the book we can consider the spiritual testament of Ronald Dworkin, who is regarded as perhaps the most important contemporary philosopher of law and the leading exponent of neoconstitutionalism.[2]

However this term may be defined by the experts, we will use it in the sense most accessible to an average European citizen born in the second half of the twentieth century: to designate the thinking that, partly, provides the foundation for and, partly, reflects and illuminates the essence of the post-war Continental constitutions that were written on the basis of the tragic experience of Nazism and Fascism and served to refound some of the states destroyed during the war—states that had been themselves responsible for this catastrophe. As examples, we can take the Italian or the German Constitution—noting however that the constitutions of nation-states are not the only normative documents informed by neoconstitutionalist thinking. Among this larger group are the declarations that, for the first time in history, bestowed authority on and, within certain limits, also gave normative force to supranational organizations and institutions. The declarations, in some ways, harken back to the old glorious dream of the European Enlightenment: the dream of a world

[1] Dworkin (2011, p. 1). The reference is to a phrase by Archilocus that Isaiah Berlin quoted and used in the title of his 1953 essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox." The essay belongs less to the category of Berlin's reflections on the foundations of political liberalism than to his extraordinary opening of new lines of inquiry into the complex relationships between individual consciousness (and the way it experiences its own free will) and the forces at play in the mass movements of history. All this is found in the form of a peerless reflection on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which every contemporary theorist of collective intentionality and social ontology should read.

[2] "*Neoconstitutionalism* has so far entered the mainstream of academia only in certain quarters of 'Latin' theory of law, in Latino-America, Spain, and Italy: It designates a family of cognitive and normative theses labelled by its supporters as nonpositivism or constitutionalism without further qualification. Neoconstitutionalism, however, first emerged in the English-language debate—more evidence still of the pivotal role this debate has played at least since Hart. Dworkin, in particular, views law and morals as connected by way of constitutional rights and principles" (Barberis and Bongiovanni 2016, p. 263). Among the texts mentioned by Barberis and Bongiovanni, see Dworkin (1977, 1986).

federation of republics that would guarantee a "perpetual peace" on this earth—and not that of the sort found in cemeteries. As examples of this second type of normative document we will take the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which took effect with the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007.

These two types of normative documents, constitutions and declarations, have precise theoretical and historical connections between them, which we will now briefly note. This will help us put back into focus the core thinking that lies at the basis of all these documents—at least to the extent that it is accessible to us as citizens who, without being experts in constitutional rights, have a responsibility to know what citizenship entails.

This core can be grasped more easily if we start from the undeniable injection of ideality into the foundations of politics, both national and international, that these normative documents should represent. This ideality finds its expression in certain fundamental principles that specify precisely the contents of justice as a value horrifically trampled by "legal" means at the hands of the twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. The thinking from which this injection of ideality originates, therefore, constitutes a theory of justice (justice as a value qualifying the fair ordering of a human society, not reducible to justice as a virtue or as a value of personal conduct)—one that, while certainly incomplete, is yet not empty.

The contents or aspects of the value of justice that were so brutalized by the twentieth-century totalitarianisms were universal human rights—that is, that which is due to each person *qua* person, without further qualification, and regardless of whether or not that person is the citizen of a state. It is, of course, necessary to identify what rights should be considered universal. This goes without saying. But it is even more important to establish on what grounds we can make so bold a claim as this: that no human being should ever have to endure the violation of their rights, whether it be at the hands of individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, or the state itself. This ground is *the equal dignity of all human persons as such*. Thus, there is a thesis that makes explicit one of the primary components of the value we call justice—trampled upon by totalitarianism but set forth with crystal clarity by the Preamble to the

Declaration of 1948. This thesis is that the principle of equal dignity must be affirmed against the principle of discrimination, whatever its basis: race, nation, class, religion, gender, and ideological or political orientation. For it is this latter principle that has caused "disregard and contempt for human rights," which, in turn, "have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind."

It is useful to pause here in order to reflect on this point, which is not as obvious as it seems. Let us consider Article I of the 1948 Declaration:

> All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

The filiation of this article with that of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 is readily apparent:

> Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be founded only on the common good.[3]

Liberté, égalité, fraternité: three intertwined notes of modern civil conscience, resounding with a kind of harmony that seems almost identical in the two formulations. And yet in the small space of this "almost" flicker the sparks of a new awareness that, after two centuries of experience, hope, and horror, have finally been forged into a clear concept: equal dignity.[4] Equality in dignity and rights, and in no other ways: neither in personal traits, talents, abilities, roles, merits, luck, vocations, or skills, nor in conditions, circumstances, wealth, or power. Equality in rights, where rights first of all means instruments for access to equal opportunities—something certainly missing in "nature," where one finds no trace of justice. Or rather access to greater opportunities, for those who are disadvantaged, in order to develop, in society, some of the advantages that are unequally distributed but necessary for a modicum of "good"

[3] "*Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune.*" https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/le-bloc-de-constitutionnalite/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789.

[4] Hunt (2007).

life. Jeanne Hersch points this out to us with her characteristic clarity, eliminating all traces of natural law metaphysics from the 1948 formulation:

> Formally, the first sentence is not a prescription but a description. But this form is ambiguous, for it requires recognition of the status which is described as a factual truth. It is no factual truth, as many believe, or pretend to believe, who quote this sentence by cutting off its end: "All humans are born free and equal." I always admired the lucidity of the International Assembly who added the words "in dignity and rights." Because actually, newborn humans are in no way free: they are the most dependent and the least capable of surviving by themselves of all young mammals. They are not born equal either, for they widely differ in inheritance, weight, size, health, gifts, chances of survival. Yet they are "free and equal in dignity and rights," that is, not in the actual world of empirical facts, but in the virtual one of what they can and should claim, the world of their responsible liberty and of all that is owed to it.[5]

The difference between the real and the ideal, or between fact and right or "ought," could not be stated more clearly.

So, let us return to the theoretical and historical connection between supranational declarations and constitutions. At this point, the connection should be clear because the constitutions include, quite explicitly, the idea of the "inviolable rights of persons"[6] (some of these constitutions, such as the Italian Constitution in Article 2, also recognize the person's "fundamental duties"), which derives from those declarations.[7]

This injection of ideality into the foundations of politics represents a great innovation for the theory of democracy. As has been authoritatively argued, post-war constitutional democracies mark the birth of a new political paradigm: "from the rule of law to the constitutional state of rights."[8]

[5] Hersch (2008 [1990], p. 110, my translation).

[6] Dworkin (2013 [1977]).

[7] Article 2: "The Republic recognizes and guarantees the inviolable rights of the person, both as an individual and in the social groups where human personality is expressed. The Republic expects that the fundamental duties of political, economic and social solidarity be fulfilled."

[8] Rodotà (2006).

This not only modifies the internal law of states, but also international law. This is because the universalist reference to what is due to the human being as such—regardless of national or group affiliation, religious or otherwise, and regardless of citizenship status—provides the foundation for that other great post-war hope which grew out of the lived experience of value and the "acquaintance with grief." The other aspect of ethical universalism embodied in the principle of the equal dignity of all human beings is cosmopolitan universalism. This is the idea that human beings as such, in their dignity as moral subjects—and thus within the constraints, prohibitions, and duties to which they are morally and legally bound—are not merely the holders and ultimate source of national sovereignty, but also the utopian messengers of an extension of the rule of law, of the domain and the spirit of the law, into the geopolitical wilds where, up to that point, the only equilibrium had been that of force—which was by its nature precarious and unstable. All this is the necessary groundwork, so that the other grand axiological vision of the Enlightenment, the Kantian vision of perpetual peace, might not forever be confined to the realm of dreams.

Taking place at the same time as the Declaration of 1948, we have the beginnings of that unprecedented venture of practical reason, the process—for a long time threatened and obstructed, and today, due to the COVID-19 crisis, perhaps given a new chance—of the creation of the European Federal Union. At that time, the Union was conceived as something that could become, not an intergovernmental organization, but a (real) supranational parliamentary democracy—with a real parliament and government, that is, one truly capable of placing a limit on national sovereignties (and national egoisms).

Across Europe, we have a clear reminder of this goal in something that no one notices but that accompanies us on every trip across the world: on our passports, the line that attests to our citizenship in the European Union is printed above the one that attests to whatever our national citizenship might be (Italian, French, and so on). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which was ratified in Nice in 2000 and went into effect with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, is organized around six chapters representing six different values: dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice.

Between the "alpha" of the equal dignity of persons, the foundation of what is due to each one of them, and the "omega" of justice, what makes it possible for people to live together in society, we find the values proclaimed at the beginning of the French Revolution: *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*. Like the Declaration of 1948, the Charter of Fundamental Rights represents an extension of the declarations of the late 1700s, which inaugurated what Norberto Bobbio has called the "age of rights," one that we can now see as perfectly positioned within the arc of exactly two centuries: from the Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. An extension, we say, because to the first two generations of civil and political rights that buried the Ancien Régime, the declarations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have added two more generations of rights, laden with the history, axiological thought, and battles of the centuries after the French Revolution. This process continued to unfold in the battles for social rights, from the movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and for cultural rights, as complex new issues arise from our multiethnic, pluralist societies. Thus, the third value from 1789, *fraternité*, reemerges under the name of *solidarity*, which brings to mind the long history of European (and not only European) communitarian and solidarity movements. These three values must be completed, so to speak, or integrated in the Charter of Fundamental Rights by one that is not explicitly identified in the previous declarations but that leads back directly to the duties and virtues of active citizenship: public ethics—the subset of ethics that is defined by these particular values or poles of ideality.

2 Public Ethics

What we mean by "injected ideality"—the ideality that is, so to speak, injected in rather large doses into the foundations of modern constitutional democracies—is, to put it in other terms, precisely *public ethics*. And once we have grasped, even if only fleetingly, the rich content and the reciprocal relationships of the concepts of value we have discussed—*liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, *solidarity*—we begin to get a sense for the thesis of the consistency, or the intrinsic "unity" of values, that Dworkin

articulated in the passage at the beginning of this chapter: the thesis about the hedgehog who “knows one big thing.” The demand for justice—the characteristically ethical demand that forms the basis of juridical thought and asserts itself as a normative constraint on politics—underscores another, closely related, foundational requirement: the requirement of *a unity of practical reason*. How does this requirement match with the sacrosanct distinctions characteristic of modernity? The very distinctions between morality, law, and politics arise justifiably against the totalizing tendencies of thought in religion, a possible basis for authoritarian societies: as if practical reason iself required its inner differentiation, while confirming that asking for and giving reasons forms an essential requirement of ethics, as founded by philosophy against every arbitrary imposition of authority or force.

Legal reasons are different from moral reasons, and political reasons are different from legal reasons: but what is not different is the educator’s or the political or legal expert’s duty to respond to the request for reasons, regardless of who is asking. The reasons will have to be different because the values that the moral norm, the legal norm, and the political project aim to realize are different, as are the negative values they aim to discourage.

But what would happen if these different values were not coherent—and consistent—with each other? If ethics did not impose a constraint on politics (the politician, as such, also holds exactly the same duties as every other citizen) and a constraint on the law (the legislator may not decide on my behalf—with laws that constrain everyone—on issues that concern domains of my life for which I am responsible, except to ensure that the life, identity, and freedom of others are respected)?

Well, in that case, these different “values” would not be values at all because they would have no value. “Moral”, legal, politixal decisions and actions would objectively have no (positive, or negative) value—no more so than two propositions that contradict each other might objectively be true.

This is the one, crucially important thing that Dworkin’s hedgehog knows, but the skeptical fox misses. This is the first thesis of an axiology whose prolegomena will be further developed in the last chapter of this book. In the first chapter, we stated that values are those positive or

negative qualities of things that make them either goods or ills—and sometimes evils. If we believe some legal institutions to be objectively wrong, even if for purely metalegal reasons, for example for breaking legal certainty, we must believe that it is objectively morally wrong to behave in a way that tends to perpetuate them. Both things are bad; they have negative value. The thesis of the objectivity of values presupposes a claim of consistency and coherence of the axiological universe. It is not possible that something that has negative value in one sphere (say, the ethical) can have positive value in another (say, the political one).

The requirement of the unity of practical reason is therefore not something that can escape the work of distinction and analysis: we have only begun to see that the value "justice" is made up of a constellation of partial contents—of values with well-known names—that together form a web of ideality woven of many threads, only some of which we have touched upon.

The ideality injected into the base of politics is thus (public) ethics. In general, public ethics also means that we must get out of the habit of shifting responsibility and railing against hazily defined, impersonal enemies: the "powers that be," "finance capital," "neoliberalism," and so on. Rather, we must identify the groups that seize illegitimate powers and fight them ethically, legally, politically, confronting them face-to-face. This requires that we take seriously the first-person perspective and recognize that, in the final analysis, responsibility has a personal character. The two great components of a democracy, that is "will" and "opinion," or the institutional and procedural dimension, and the dimension of public debate have undergone a dramatic disconnection to each other in recent history. Despite the "disfigured" democracy resulting from this disconnection, there has been paradoxically an exponential growth in importance of the second component, and a corresponding shift in the center of gravity from political parties to citizens.[9]

[9] Urbinati (2014, p. 2). "Representative democracy is a *diarchic system* in which 'will' (by which I mean the right to vote and the procedures and institutions that regulate the making of authoritative decisions) and 'opinion' (by which I mean the extra-institutional domain of political opinions) influence each other and cooperate without merging." Urbinati analyzes the two sides of the sphere of opinion in the age of internet and the socials: on the one hand its ever growing relative importance and on the other the ever-growing threats of a complete thwarting of its role.

The responsibility that falls upon the bearers of sovereignty in democratic regimes, the citizens, is correspondingly increasing. They are the ultimate source of all sovereignty: they bear all the weight of (practical) reason—both by asking for the reasons and justification of the acts of public officers and by discussing the ends of government. As we have said, before being a form of government, a democracy is a civilization grounded on reason (rather than on religion). But this means that it is grounded not on solid rock, but on our questions. Democracy has reached its ultimate root: Socrates. Its extreme fragility, and all of its greatness, resides in this root.

3 On the Unity of Values: Hedgehogs and Foxes, or the Long Shadow of Doubt

Once we have grasped the enormity of the historical events that separate Dworkin from Simone Weil in time, his claims about the unity of values suddenly come into acute focus. This has also allowed us to put a name on some of these values and to ask ourselves whether we have really understood all those goods and evils that we talk about when we use this slippery word "values." Perhaps we now have a provisional sense of Dworkin's claim about the "unity" of values. But what about those theses that the hedgehog opposes? Who are the hedgehogs, and who are the foxes?

The thesis of the unity of value, or the thesis of the consistency and coherence of values in their plurality and in their different spheres, is one of contemporary philosophy's most profound and well-articulated theses; but it is also among the least widely held, both now and for the entire twentieth century. An "old and far-reaching philosophical thesis," Dworkin calls it with a wink. By calling it "old," Dworkin refers a touch ironically to a widespread conception that would separate the twentieth century from the rest of the past, pinpointing the watershed in the thought of Nietzsche, who dared to go "beyond good and evil" and to propose a genealogy of morals growing out of a kind of realpolitik based

on relations of power and the primeval reality of vital and social conflicts. Max Weber gave this conception definitive form in 1919:

> If anything, we realize again today that something can be sacred not only in spite of its not being beautiful, but rather because and in so far as it is not beautiful. […] And, since Nietzsche, we realize that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect. You will find this expressed earlier in the *Fleurs du mal*, as Baudelaire named his volume of poems. It is commonplace to observe that something may be true although it is not beautiful and not holy and not good.[10]

In other words, Weber contests the very idea of the unity of values—that "old" idea that Dworkin refers to. At first glance, this distinctively modern contestation seems all but self-evident, and so it was presented as something obvious from the beginning of the last century. Indeed, it has become the "common sense" of most non-religious people—and even of many professed believers. At any rate, it is the conception that remains dominant within the sphere of liberal political theory.[11] Even if, in recent decades, academic philosophers (in particular those dealing with morals) have vigorously debated the nature of values, the thesis of the consistency and coherence of the axiological universe typical of Dworkin has remained a minority view: according to some, one can even doubt whether the nature of values, as constituted and defined by their consistency and coherence, is compatible with liberal pluralism.

After Weber, the liberal philosopher par excellence, for whom axiological "monism" is incompatible with political pluralism, the thinker directly targeted by the title of Dworkin's final masterpiece, *Justice for Hedgehogs*, is Isaiah Berlin. We have already spoken of him in the previous chapter, alongside Popper, as a critic of the essence of totalitarianism that they suppose implicit in Platonic thought. As you may remember, regarding

[10] Weber, "Science as Vocation" (1958) [1919], p. 148.

[11] Isaiah Berlin is a classic example of this, as, in a broader sense, are Popper and Hayek, even if we have seen Martha Nussbaum counter with "not morally neutral"—and thus, presumably, not "polytheistic"—forms of political liberalism, among which the classic twentieth-century form is "early Rawls" (see Sect. 2).

this kind of liberal critic, I objected to the sheer identification made between the (frightening) utopia of the Platonic republic, as described in *The Republic* or, worse, *The Laws*, and the axiological foundation of all practical thought and, therefore, also of politics. I argued against the idea that axiological skepticism—the thesis that judgments of value cannot be true (or false)—is a necessary step to avoid a totalitarian or even simply a fundamentalist drift in thought.

Based on that questionable idea, multicultural pluralism is only compatible with axiological and moral relativism. This has become the common sense of our era. But the axiological foundation of politics and the specific structure of a Platonic republic are things so different that, while we can easily imagine Plato's utopia transforming itself into a dystopian nightmare, it is precisely an axiological foundation, on the contrary, that we need in order to formulate this critique of Plato's dystopia. In other words, within a more adequate axiological horizon, the Platonic utopia is disclosed as *dystopic* precisely because the *freedom* of individuals—even the freedom simply to change caste—is never contemplated, nor is their *equal dignity* ever contemplated. So, we also need an adequate axiological foundation if we are going to articulate, in clear propositions, the greater knowledge of justice we have acquired, in comparison with Plato, by means of the tragic experiences of more than 2000 years of history.

After all, these two axiological theses about justice—that of the freedom of persons and that of their equal dignity—today are so widely recognized and seem so self-evident that, even where they are systematically violated, they are never confronted head-on. A third thesis follows from the first two: that a society without discrimination with respect to personal dignity is more just than—that is, is superior in value to—a hierarchical society. These three claims, as we can see, illustrate both the "horizontal" substantive relationships among values (like those between justice and two of its "parts" or component values, liberty and equal dignity) and the "vertical" relationships of rank (like that of an order of axiological superiority or objective priority, rather than subjective preference).

Isaiah Berlin might not agree with some parts of these claims, but how can we justify criticism of the supposedly utopian, and really dystopic, ideal of a Platonic republic if not with rational arguments like these? Why would Plato's utopia be a nightmare? Certainly, there are no shortage of

arguments for making the case. But what type of arguments would these be? Axiological arguments, *tout court*.

These remarks should clarify our answer to the question concerning the identities of the hedgehog and the fox: the fox represents axiological skepticism, while the hedgehog represents, not its dogmatic opposite (herein lies the great confusion), but the quest for truth with respect to questions of value. Now, in order to be able to search for this truth, logic (at least) must be safe. Although they may both be false, two incompatible propositions cannot both be true. But two propositions like "a hierarchical society (regarding dignity, of course) is better than a society where all have equal dignity" and "a society where all have equal dignity is better than a hierarchical one" are certainly incompatible. Therefore, they cannot both be true: if one of them is true, the other one must be false.

This, in its simplicity, is the thesis of the hedgehog. So-called axiological "monism," which is actually the thesis about the consistency of judgments of value, is simply a precondition for axiological cognitivism: in order to be true, one axiological thesis cannot be incompatible with another *true* axiological thesis. This is Dworkin's fundamental point: the truths about different values must "cohere."[12] Once all the axiological qualifications have been pared away, we are left only with this simple logical thesis.

To see how the fox really embodies axiological skepticism, we can take Isaiah Berlin's direct testimony on the matter by looking at his beautiful essay, "On the Pursuit of the Ideal," which serves as a perfect countermelody to the main themes of this book.

Berlin speaks of his discovering Machiavelli in his youth and observes that, for the Italian thinker, the "combination of *virtù* [the idea of virtue in the ancient Roman Republic] and Christian values is […] an impossibility. [Machiavelli] simply leaves you to choose—he knows which he himself prefers." Then he concludes:

> The idea that this planted in my mind was the realization, which came as something of a shock, that not all the supreme values pursued by mankind

[12] Dworkin (2011, p. 1): "The truth about living well and being good and what is wonderful is not only coherent but mutually supporting: what we think about any one of these must stand up, eventually, to any argument we find compelling about the rest."

> now and in the past were necessarily compatible with one another. It undermined my earlier assumption, based on the *philosophia perennis*, that there could be no conflict between true ends, true answers to the central problems of life.[13]

The first issue this passage raises is this: if, contrary to the young Berlin's original beliefs based on the "philosophia perennis," there is conflict or incompatibility between "true answers" to the central problems of life, *in what sense can they be true answers*?

Certainly not in the ordinary sense: if *p* and *q* are incompatible, they cannot both be true. So, if the conflict is not simply between a true thesis and a false one, this position amounts to axiological skepticism: in the proper sense of "true," judgments of value cannot be true.

But we can, of course, interpret the author's statement in a more generous and sympathetic way. The beautiful intellectual autobiography Berlin sketches in the essay allows the heroes of a disillusioned modernity to emerge little by little—disillusioned with respect to the idea that there can exist a knowledge of goods and evils that is not, itself, tied to a "culture," a culture being already, fundamentally, a system of values embodied in a way of being, a style of life. These heroes are Machiavelli, Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Alexander Herzen. To this list we could also add Nietzsche, Dilthey's hermeneutics, historicism, and postmodernism.

Well, then? Would we want to deny, perhaps, that there exist different orders of value priority, different *ethe* (plural of "ethos,") that form the basis for the normative structures of different cultures, for their civilizations, even for their technical know-how, for their ways of organizing pedagogy and *paideia*? Would we want to deny the fact and even the value of pluralism?

[13] Berlin (2013 [1953], pp. 8–9).

4 Axiological Skepticism or Cognitivism? The Nature of the Conflict and Pluralism

This is certainly *not* what we want: the beauty of the cognitivist challenge lies precisely in its promise to recognize both the existence and the value of pluralism, without giving up on the idea that axiological research must remain, until the end, a search for truth. This makes it possible, then, to pursue appropriate modes of research and discussion instead of engaging in either conflict or compromise, war or cunning. This goes for politics, too. Indeed, public debate can really only be understood in this sense: reasons must be (or aim to be) true reasons and not simply rationalizations or cleverly masked interests or ideological fairy tales.

To understand what is at stake in the disagreement between hedgehogs and foxes we must first disentangle what we mean by "axiological pluralism." It is therefore necessary to distinguish between (at least) the following claims:

(1) That there is a plurality of values. This, of course, is obvious. In fact, it is hard to deny that there are countless values, but it does not make much sense to state that there can be conflict between different values like, say, utility and grace, except in the sense that what is at stake is a choice regarding the priority of goods to be realized. Therefore, there is at most a conflict between two orders of priority.

(2) That there is a plurality of spheres of value. This may be less obvious, but it has been observed in every age and across the most varying approaches to axiology—if nothing else, in the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goods. Even the relationship between means and ends entails an order of priority between related/respective goods: financial well-being, for example, can traditionally be considered subordinate and instrumental with respect to the fulfillment that may, in some cases, depend on it: personal flourishing, science, art, etc. "Man does not live by bread alone"; "we eat to live, not live to eat." Moreover, within the class of intrinsic values, nobody would confuse the spheres of aesthetical, moral, epistemic, and religious values.

(3) Lastly, that there is a plurality of value-systems (for instance, Christianity, on the one hand, and Roman virtue, on the other); that is, there exist different orders of axiological priority, or rankings of value, *ethe*, that in post-Rawlsian language are called "comprehensive conceptions of the good."

The last is the most significant sense of pluralism, and the hedgehog certainly has no desire to reduce all orders of value priority to only one. That would be the worst violation of the value that is as integral a part of justice as equal dignity: freedom. Freedom, as the foundation of generations of civil and political rights, and so, obviously, also of the right to live according to one's own ethos within the limits of respect for those of others, will necessarily result in a multiplicity of value priorities. Ideally, a "constitutional democracy of rights" ought to accommodate different comprehensive conceptions of the good, perhaps as many conceptions as there are citizens or at least communities, groups, identities, etc. The opposition between hedgehog and fox, then, does not reside here. Where, then?

The opposition is about the nature of the most universal and important phenomenon of human history: conflict, discord, disagreement—and therefore, naturally, also politics and war. Let us take the very beginning of Isaiah Berlin's most famous essay on "negative freedom": political theory would never have been conceived if "men never disagreed about the ends of life, if our ancestors had remained undisturbed in the Garden of Eden."[14] True enough.

The hedgehog's point of view would be myopic indeed if it consisted in denying the existence of wars, from those that cause bloodshed across the world to those that disturb peace inside the household and even deep inside the individual, to the civilized kind of conflicts that supposedly unfold within a framework of rules, under "the empire of the law,"[15] in the political life of societies. Where the hedgehog and the fox disagree is about how to read such conflicts and, more generally, dissent in axiological matters, that is a key aspect of the life of any democracy.

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[14] Berlin (1969).

[15] Dworkin (1998 [1986]).

There is a concise way to express this crucial point of opposition. It lies in the following alternative: either the structure of ideality that has been considered the basis for "legitimate" politics by the various post-war constitutions and declarations is simply the expression of one ethos among others, and is, therefore, an expression of axiological particularity (that of a given identity, religion, culture, etc.); or, it is an expression of a set of universal axiological principles, in the sense that these principles are universally recognizable as true (until proven otherwise) on the basis of evidence that is, in principle, accessible to everyone, from within every culture. Is, then, the web of ideality referenced in the principles of the declarations and constitutions we have mentioned simply one ethos among others (the "Western" ethos)? Or is it the universal minimal basis of public ethics with which every ethos ought to be compatible?

There is no doubt as to the fox's answer: the political liberalism that has inspired this web of ideality is an ethos like any other—it is simply "ours."

Nevertheless, the fox's position—or at least the position of the vast class of foxes that Berlin represents—does not want to be one of axiological relativism. Indeed, this position is not at all reducible to the postmodernism of people like Rorty, Derrida, Vattimo, and others (that in our skeptical fauna represent a very light variant of the fox—the dancing moths, the postmodern). Pluralism, Berlin insists, does not entail relativism:

> "I prefer coffee, you prefer champagne. We have different tastes. There is no more to be said." That is relativism. But Herder's view, and Vico's, is not that: it is what I should describe as pluralism—that is, the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other [...] But our values are ours, and theirs are theirs.[16]

The examples Berlin provides are the classic ones, which we are still debating in moral philosophy: Antigone's dilemma, Gauguin's dilemma (to offer the world sublime work or give his family what families expect), freedom for wolves that means death for lambs, equality that undercuts

[16] Berlin (2013 [1988], p. 11).

freedom, justice against mercy, and so on. In the hedgehog's view, none of these dilemmas justifies the fox's conclusion, but they at least allow us to clearly grasp it. No one doubts that, to different personal identities (and accompanying roles, professions, functions, memberships, age groups, or even given cultural and religious identities), there correspond different orders of axiological priority and, therefore, different "ends of life." But axiological particularity is not, as such, a source of conflict, unless a given particular ethos—based on value priorities that are *not* supposed to be universally accessible and verifiable so to speak transculturally by any moral subject, but on the contrary define a particular identity—tries to impose itself on other particular identities.

On the other hand, the claim that an axiological principle is universally valid—in the precise sense that it entails universally binding norms—can legitimately be advanced only if reasons are given, reasons on the basis of which anyone can see that the claim is well founded and, therefore, recognize that it is correct. Disagreement may remain: but then it is not disagreement based on the content of the axiological principle, but on its application. For example, Socrates does not at all dispute the fact that the law used to condemn him is right, because it is true that it is wrong to corrupt the youth. But he disputes the fact that his is a case of corrupting the youth.[17] However, can there be axiological principles that are universally recognizable as true?[18]

Berlin seems to have to deny that such principles are possible. His conclusion seems to be that the essence of value is its *conflictual* nature:

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[17] Plato, *Crito* 49e–50b. It should be noted that Socrates does not decide to respect the law even though it is unjust, as is sometimes said. Socrates does not consider the law false, but rather its interpretation faulty. Thus, he finds its application on the part of the Athenian court to be incorrect. And this is essentially his argument: certainly, if I had corrupted the youths, the laws would be right to punish me. But I didn't corrupt the youth: and I could convince you of this, judges of Athens, if I had infinite time. But I do not have this time. Truth is not able to emerge clearly, evidently, in a way knowable by everyone, in the ever-limited time given to humans. And I have not been able to persuade you. If I had been able to, if you had been able to *see* clearly that I had not corrupted the youths, you would certainly have changed your verdict.

[18] Note: for the axiological cognitivist, it suffices that an axiological truth be recognizable *in principle*, even if not recognized at present. Still, it is important to note that the principle of equal dignity of human beings, even though it is sometimes interpreted in ways that continue to admit of discrimination, has not been contested head-on by meaningful alternatives.

"These collisions of values are of the essence of what they [i.e., values] are and what we are."[19]

Let us sum up the essential points of contrast between the fox and the hedgehog. That there is no rational issue to value dissent is for the fox the very root not only of wars, but of politics and political theory as well. This seems exactly Berlin's claim in the above quoted passage, implying that politics and political theory have no foundations in *practical reason* (but, at most, in strategic rationality). The hedgehog argues against such a claim, and for a (re)foundation of politics and political theory in practical reason and ethics. Two opposed views of value dissent and of politics are confronted here. The "truth and falsity" language, at the end of the day, is not really to be taken seriously in the mouth of the fox: value commitments do not really express one's pondered belief in the truth or falsity of corresponding value judgments, but affirm one's "identity" and one's will to persist in it. They express a conative more than a doxastic state. This is why value dissent is the outright conflict of identities: *hostility*, which may at best be tempered by tolerance or political compromise, but not really overcome by recognition of any degree of justification in the opposer's position. Dissent never becomes epistemic disagreement, that is difference of perspectives on what is taken to be the same object or fact. This view on the nature of value disagreement implies a tragic view of society and history.

It remains to be seen whether Berlin's overall position is coherent, given that, a few lines earlier, speaking of the most remote civilizations, he admits that "if we did not have any values in common with these distant figures, each civilization would be enclosed in its own impenetrable bubble, and we could not understand them at all."[20] But the fact that we can radically dissent while continuing to understand each other is something that Berlin himself confirmed in our earlier quote.

Be that as it may, it is clear that Berlin takes the "polytheism of values" as seriously as Dworkin takes the universality of rights: it is like a new version of the argument between Socrates and Euthyphro, since, in order to take the polytheism of values seriously, one must believe that

[19] Berlin (2013 [1988], p. 13).

[20] Ibid., p. 11

ultimately this option is not subject to the jurisdiction of reason because it is entrusted to the incontestability of our will or of our faith: in any case, this view takes the will, and not recognizable evidence, as the ultimate source of norms and values. And so Berlin concludes: "Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss."[21]

5 The Embodiment of Practical Reason

The dispute between the hedgehog and the fox matters much more to us than the specific doctrines of Dworkin and Berlin. Dworkin is certainly a great theorist and, as we have said, the bold champion of an axiological cognitivism that is still today, as it had been for the entire twentieth century, very much a minority view. But the theses of *Justice for Hedgehogs* are relevant to us here—though we are not following its detailed argumentation—essentially as a philosophical reading of the magnitude of the events that have taken place. Fundamentally, Dworkin's theses are based on an important fact that we described, albeit briefly, at the start of this chapter, one I would like to call *the normative embodiment of practical reason*. Here Dworkin demonstrates a crystal-clear awareness of this same embodied practical reason. It is no accident that he was a legal scholar before becoming a philosopher, for his entire philosophy can be read as the most lucid explication of what it means, for a common law jurist, to interpret the spirit of the laws.

Dworkin is, in this particular respect, the Socrates of our modernity: and in fact, every line of the preface of his great book *Law's Empire* seems to evoke the famous discourse on law in Plato's *Cratylus*:

> We live in and by the law. It makes us what we are: citizens and employees and doctors and spouses and people who own things. It is sword, shield and menace: we insist on our wage, or refuse to pay our rent, or are forced to forfeit penalties, or are closed up in jail, all in the name of what our abstract and ethereal sovereign, the law, has decreed. And we argue about

[21] Ibid., p. 14.

> what is decreed, even when the books that are supposed to record its commands and directions are silent; we act then as if law had muttered its doom, too low to be heard distinctly. We are subjects of law's empire, liegemen to its methods and ideals, bound in spirit while we debate what we must therefore do.[22]

But reality reveals both greatness and wretchedness everywhere, and the normative embodiment of practical reason is by no means the only face of the twentieth century. Cold War was starting while Human Rights where being declared. We have seen the terrible reality of world wars leave their stamp on the very heart of Berlin's thought—his axiological skepticism. As to wars, while the situation in Europe is still, despite it all, one of peace, this is not at all the case on Europe's doorstep. European foreign politics, as is well known, almost does not exist as such, anyway it is far from being up to the UE charter, and it is characterized above all by Europe's "absent sovereignty."[23]

Here, too, the role of the fox matters much more to us than positions of any individual thinker. If we have taken Berlin's work as a paradigm of axiological skepticism, it is precisely because at its best—at the height of intellectual and critical honesty, or indeed in the midst of the splendor of European humanism[24]—we can detect in it the gesture of resignation—or self-abdication of the quest for *reasons*—that has characterized so much of the philosophy of the last century.

In this sense, it is as if the other face of such normative embodiment were a sort of *removal* of practical reason from philosophy (from the living exercise of the "jurisdiction of reason")—as if this "jurisdiction" had moved from the faculty of philosophy to the faculty of law, and the exercise of reason could now be delegated to a legal bureaucracy that would just watch over the enforcement of laws.

We have actually experienced this shift. The twentieth century, the century that saw the failure of practical reason in the form of two world

[22] Preface in Dworkin (1998 [1986]).

[23] Spinelli (2014). By this Barbara Spinelli means the absence of a foreign policy by the EU.

[24] As is well known, Sir Isaiah Berlin was a great humanist: he made his debut in literary studies, in Russian literature in particular; this was also due to his origins and to the truly "cosmopolitan" life he led.

wars, totalitarianisms, concentration camps, and extermination camps, also saw a new dawn of reason with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the various international and European conventions that have further articulated and developed it, and given it more detail. The post-war period saw those very European states that had sunk into the evils of totalitarianism refounded on strictly constitutional bases. This period also saw the establishment of new political entities and institutions, both European and international, that have been able to mitigate conflict and advance the causes of peace and cooperation. These successes have, of course, been punctuated by alternating cycles of impotence and bitter re-awakenings, while genuine social, political, and economic achievements have too often been adulterated by great inertia. Nevertheless, all this very concrete, if tenuous, progress represents the legacy of a very few pages of immense clarity on "perpetual peace,"[25] written by the greatest moral philosopher of modern times. These few pages, encompassing the best inheritance of all modern—but not just modern—ethical, juridical, and religious thought, represent a paper bulwark against inhumanity.

So, when it comes to the good, the world has small, almost invisible roots made of paper, as it were, and thoughts: philosophical roots. What should make philosophers proud is the fact that, at the beginning of post-war Europe (and before the Cold War took over) philosophy in its purest form was dictating the laws.

The first form of axiological skepticism we have analyzed, that of the liberal but in the end tragic fox of Weber and Berlin, exemplifies a part of my main idea in this chapter—that the normative embodiment of practical reason has been a paradoxical earthly success of philosophy—without philosophers (or enough of them) to reawaken and revive the "spirit of the law." We started looking at the two faces of the phenomenon: much more is still to be said on the skeptical wave that removed, in some sense, practical reason from its home in philosophy, as well as its *normative embodiment* in declarations and constitutions, which, paradoxically, has been the real triumph, the real epochal achievement of philosophy itself. Let's draw some conclusions from this analysis, starting with its second aspect: reason's embodiment.

[25] Kant (2003 [1795]).

In the end, it is a kind of miracle that practical reason, for such a long time confined within philosophy and almost always defeated in history, managed at a certain point to establish itself inside reality, becoming embodied in norms that have a certain effect on the lives of everyone. In a certain sense, the Kantian hope that in the "conflict of faculties" philosophy would become the main guide of jurisprudence was realized. If we take as an example the classic normative documents of the twentieth century we have examined, we can see quite readily how they constitute an embodiment of our reason.

Here, too, let us proceed step-by-step. We can first of all see why these documents represent an *embodiment* of reason. They have a real causal impact on the lives of individuals and populations. In this way, the constitutionalization and the internationalization of fundamental rights undoubtedly entails a double limit, internal and external, on state sovereignty: a limit on internal sovereignty because the legislator cannot issue laws that violate rights; a limit on external sovereignty because legislator and government cannot adopt foreign policies that risk compromising international peace and security. There is also an effect on international rights that end up applying not only to states but also to individuals: to everyone, as persons, possessing fundamental rights, universal and inviolable; and to the various institutions (national, regional, international) and non-governmental organizations concerned with the international implementation and safeguarding of fundamental rights. And lastly, with the above-mentioned transition from the state of law to the constitutional state of rights, a new political paradigm of democracy has been born.

6 Construction or Cognition? Between Kant and Rawls: What Is Missing?

It should not be doubted that it is precisely the purest *philosophical* tradition of modern practical reason that is embodied in the normative documents we have discussed. The well-known Kantian definition of law (in the sense of a legal system) describes it as the sphere of "conditions under which the voluntary actions of any one person can be harmonized in

reality with the voluntary actions of every other person, according to a universal law of freedom,"[26] these conditions being precisely the equal consideration and respect due to each person that each person requires. In this sense, with Kant, we can also say that law, based on principles of this kind, conforms to his idea—where the idea of the law is justice ("idea," here, does not refer to a concept but to a source of normativity: a value). Let's designate this thesis (K), so that we have:

(K) Justice is the value that serves to orient the principles of law.

So, let's consider the above mentioned clause, which can appear so obvious at first, referring to the conditions of harmony of different wills: that each person receive *the equal consideration and respect each person requires*. "Requires," because every person has dignity equal to all others. "Requires," therefore, does not simply represent a subjective claim but rather a rational or well-founded demand, as in the phrase: "this boat requires careful maintenance." It is impossible not to recognize here a reference to the value *justice* which is embodied in the equal treatment of equals; and a reference to the value *dignity* that we recognize in people as such (independent of any actual qualitative difference and, therefore, of other aspects of value).

Political philosophy was revolutionized in the second half of the last century by an author who explicitly referred back to Kant: John Rawls, who singles out precisely the idea of justice and returns it to the forefront of philosophical inquiry. Rawls's thought has undoubtedly reopened the front of ideality to philosophers—Rawlsian constructivism is considered the starting point for a "normative" political philosophy, one that can orient effective planning toward a "just society"—as opposed to "realist" political thought, which is entirely skeptical of the cognitive and normative capacity of philosophical thought in matters of value and in the approach to conflicts.[27] Much has also been said of the turning point—or rather of the evolution—that would lead the "second" Rawls to reduce so

[26] Kant (2017 [1797]). The first of Rawls's principles in *A Theory of Justice* does not sound so different.

[27] I do not mean to imply that *any* form of political realism implies axiological skepticism. In this context, where "realism" is opposed to "normativism," as is customary in political philosophy, the

significantly the normative in favor of the realistic element in his theory of political liberalism.[28] From the point of view of the hedgehog, nevertheless, this evolution is only a logical development. (We will come back to this in the next chapter, with regard to the hedgehog's fundamental critical question: the question of truth.)[29]

Indeed, constructivism is distinguished from axiological cognitivism in the way that a so-called "formal" or procedural ethics is distinguished from a "material" or substantive one. Rawls's idea, which remains constant throughout the works that follow *A Theory of Justice*, is to identify the principles that characterize a society in which "anyone" would wish to live, that is, of which "anyone" would approve if asked: a hypothetical procedure through which an intersubjective conception of the just can indeed be "constructed"—one that remains neutral with respect to different "comprehensive conceptions of the good," therefore a society characterized by axiological pluralism (resulting in the thesis of the "priority of the just" over the good). This procedure, in the end, does not apply to the individual in an empirical sense but simply as a "reasonable"[30] and moral agent—that is, one not impeded in his or her choices by contingent ends, interests, and motivations (a circumstance that becomes clear under the thought experiment of the "veil of ignorance").[31]

Rawls himself, after all, presents the idea of the original position under conditions of ignorance as a thought experiment aimed toward the

political realists I refer to might rather qualify as supporters or admirers of a realpolitik, in the ordinary sense of political decisions unworried by moral scruples.

[28] Rawls (2005 [1993]).

[29] Dworkin's critique of Rawls is masterfully summarized in three short pages in Dworkin (2011, pp. 63–66). An extremely useful, clear, and exhaustive discussion of the debate that continues to surround this Rawlsian transition can be found in Sala (2012)—a discussion that leads the author to a reasoned acceptance of an idea of politics "without truth" which is seemingly held as a very respectable position in what we might call *the club of the agnostic reason*.

[30] The two Rawlsian principles of justice are, in order: (1) The Principle of Equal Liberty: "Each person has an equal right to the most extensive liberties compatible with similar liberties for all." (2) The Difference Principle: "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity." Rawls (2003 [1971], p. 60).

[31] That is, if one imagines a situation in which those participating in the agreement constituting the society in which they would wish to live do not know what their actual situation will be: social, patrimonial, professional, etc.

rational reconstruction of our sense of justice,[32] although this idea becomes less pronounced in his later works, in which there is a move from rational reconstruction to the idea of "consensus by intersection" of different points of view that, ultimately, represent different systems for the ordering of priorities of values and interests.

Nevertheless, what remains—with its clear Enlightenment and Kantian origins—is the principle that claims the same freedom for all, including the freedom to honor one's own god or to live according to one's own scale of values, naturally, on condition of respecting the analogous freedom of all others. Rawls initially presents this principle as constitutive of the idea of justice: it is not contingent on the relativity of subjective axiological systems of ordering but, on the contrary, represents the foundation for their peaceful coexistence and for the prohibition of an abuse of power by one over the others. And, as such, it appears to be an entirely objective value that each rational agent would recognize once placed in the situation of making a choice based on reasons that do not depend on their contingent ends, motivations, and desires.

But if this is how things stand, what in the end separates this updated Kantianism from the research program on the universe of values, the "hedgehog's program"? What is missing?

Almost nothing, and yet also everything. Once more, what is missing is the possibility of recognizing that our constitutions were born from the *experience* of evil and the under standing of pain and not as some kind of abstraction from conflicting visions. They are based on *substantive* theses, recognized and accepted after confrontations and discussions almost always radical and uncompromising, not on formal procedures of validation. On the contrary, a Rawlsian theoretical foundation for a constitutional democracy based on rights leaves out a substantial aspect of our world experience today: the fact that, when things go well, we still debate which rights justice should include (calling this "public debate"), but when things go poorly, we put up with the fact that the constitutional charter will be emptied of its ideal contents in the day-to-day practice of politics. What is not taken into consideration is the life and progress (or regress) of our day-to-day axiological experience as citizens. After all, the

[32] Rawls, "The Sense of Justice" [1963] in Rawls (1999).

less life is illuminated by conceptually rigorous thinking, the better it can be exploited by ideological simplifications like those found in our marketplace.

Of course, this exclusion of axiological *experience*—alive and in progress—from our thinking on justice has an elevated, Kantian root. Experience seems to be the source of particularisms, contingencies, and relativity. But we know what price had to be paid for the *Critique of Practical Reason*. There was a clean break between practical, rational thought and the sensitive, embodied, day-to-day cognition of all the goods and evils that we find and carry into the world. There was a separation between the form and the content of norms. A road block was placed on our ability to examine the lived experience of value—in terms of moral education or growth—that we have accumulated ever since the expulsion of Adam and Eve, so to speak. The lived experience of value, perhaps at its most intense in joy and pain, is simply made of the entire range of our emotions, feelings, and passions, through which we learn what matters to us. Nothing seems more needed than sentimental education to grow axiologically adult.

One of Kant's most disconcerting statements is that there is nothing in the world that is good except a good will. By this he meant that there is nothing, beyond the intention, that is morally good—without qualification—and here we must admit he is right. But this, precisely, is, in a certain sense, monstrous: that there should be no relation between the morally good will and the actual goods and the evils of all sorts that we find and carry out in the world—from the countless sources of pleasure and health or pain and illness to the absence or presence of some small measure of welfare or comfort for all, to fragile beauty and the ugliness that threatens it, to the flowering of the arts and sciences, to ever-increasing corruption and the squandering of public assets, and so on. It beggars the imagination.

And, of course, there has been a philosophical reaction. Consequentialism, in due course, *does* relativize "good will," or the moral reasons for acting, to the actual goods and ills it brings about, thereby depriving moral duty of any "categorical," *a priori*, or unconditional mode of obligation. It ends up by relativizing and "naturalizing" ethics itself. This is the reason why we need an alternative both to deontological

and to consequentialist sorts of normative ethics. Both, in fact, share a tacit presupposition, or rather, a sheer confusion: that between *values* and *goods*—that is, the always partial, imperfect, historically relative realizations of values. Disentangling this confusion, addressing the *nature* and *contents* of values as such, distinguished from their variable realizations, is the task of *material* axiology.

Going back to a Kantian point. It is true that the validity of moral reasons is not infected by the actual ills that actions can bring about unintentionally. But it surely *is* corrupted by the *disvalues* that a moral intention can fail to envisage as possible consequences of an action—such as allowing an innocent person to be killed in order not to lie to his or her persecutor. Confronting the *contents* and the *order of priority* of realizable values is part of the substantive cognitive research any moral deliberation involves. That there are no connections between the value of good will (Kant) or the procedural principles needed to establish a just society (Rawls), and all the other values and disvalues we experience, and that give all sense to our lives: this is simply not credible. What has been missing, starting from Kant (or Rawls) is a theory that can truly show us these distinctions and connections.

But neither will we find a philosophical theory of values that can illuminate our day-to-day experience in Dworkin. Ultimately, Dworkin only poses the preliminary questions (which he goes on to debate with countless opponents[33]): Why shouldn't the judgment of value have truth conditions? Why shouldn't there be axiological research and knowledge? Why so much opposition to such reasonable questions? It seems to have (at least) two causes.

One cause is the idea that pluralism itself is a sufficient reason for skepticism, or at least for axiological agnosticism. Here, *agnosticism* is taken to mean precisely the suspension of verification and research—and *not* the momentary suspension of a judgment that is not yet sufficiently well-founded. In the next chapter, we will briefly consider this version of quasi-skepticism, axiological agnosticism, which, starting from the 1990s, completes the picture of Rawlsian constructivism.

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[33] Dworkin (2010, p. 1059).

The other cause of opposition to axiological cognitivism is the Kantian heritage that sees in any "matter" of desire, in any concrete, "thick," axiological content—capable of "moving the heart," of moving one to disdain or inspiring hope—the threat of a will that is not free, but rather arbitrary or other-directed, "heteronomous." It is this same fear that, in today's philosophical language, distinguishes universally acceptable principles of justice from particular comprehensive conceptions of the good, and rightly affirms the priority of the just over the good, against any threat from the Hegelian "ethical state." But this fear has led to the mistaken assumption that the very notion of objective value necessarily constitutes a potential totalitarian threat. Consequently, whenever someone raises the question of truth on the topic of goods and evils, there is a tendency to see the menacing shadow of a fundamentalist—whether it be Jacobin or Taliban.

Our hedgehog, on the other hand, does raise the question of truth. What are the principles of the great normative documents founded on? In the final analysis, Dworkin would say, they are founded on judgments of value that are true and recognized as true until proven otherwise. By the same token, they are judgments that make explicit our intuitions on justice. Precisely our intuitions on justice presuppose "not only that people have rights but that one among these is fundamental and even axiomatic […] the right to equal concern and respect,"[34] which not only does not oppose but actually entails the right to liberty. Dworkin contradicts "the popular and dangerous idea that individualism [as affirmed by rights to liberty] is the enemy of equality. That idea is the common mistake of libertarians who hate equality and egalitarians who hate liberty."[35]

In this polemical remark, we recognize the thesis of consistency and coherence of the axiological universe at work, according to which—if we think back to Dworkin's quotation opening this chapter—true axiological judgements about these different values must "not only [be] coherent but mutually supporting: what we think about any one of these must stand up, eventually, to any argument we find compelling about the rest."[36]

[34] Dworkin (2013 [1977], p. 7).

[35] Ibid., p. 8.

[36] Dworkin (2011, p. 1).

Indeed, Dworkin is even more adamant about the non-conflictual nature of liberty and equality, in *Justice for Hedgehogs*:

> No government is legitimate unless it subscribes to two reigning principles. First, it must show equal concern for the fate of every person over whom it claims dominion. Second, it must respect fully the responsibility and right of each person to decide for himself how to make something valuable of his life.[37]

7 What about Today? Philosophers and Declarations of Rights: First Inquiry

It is clear that what existing governments do in practice is very far from satisfying the above principles, even in countries where the gap between democratic ideals and reality is somewhat less pronounced. But it is noteworthy that principles of this type are substantially written into their foundational documents. Therefore, in general, today these normative documents possess, not just an intellectual and moral content that is immeasurably beyond that of the average contemporary politician, but even an "explosive" potential for political projects hard to find anywhere else.

It is instructive in this regard to see how much even the language of the few European philosophers still determined to fulfill the Kantian role of being "voices of reason" in the public sphere, and who remain unconcerned about the "end of ideology," has changed over the decades. Take, for example, the most renowned normative political theorist in Europe today, Jürgen Habermas, who is as active as ever in public debate. In earlier times he was a theoretician of discourse ethics, which certainly provided a rational foundation for practical thought, but was unlikely to endorse any material ethics of values—that is to say, any substantive practical principle centered on the contents of value, not just on its formal or procedural aspects. But here is how Habermas expresses himself today (or

[37] Dworkin (2011, p. 2).

rather, how he did before the pandemics), reflecting on the crisis and stagnation of the process of European political unification:

> However, these normative claims themselves are grounded in universalistic moral notions that have long since gained entry into the human and civil rights of democratic constitutions through the status-bound idea of human dignity. Only this internal connection between human dignity and human rights gives rise to the explosive fusion of moral contents with the medium of law in which the construction of just political orders must be performed.[38]

Paradoxically, a philosopher expressing himself in these terms, at the time when international and European institutions were being established and the shadows of the Cold War loomed, would have been a voice outside the mainstream. At that time, continental philosophy nourished itself more on ideology than ideality, that is, more on the great shadows of the real forces and the great powers fighting for geopolitical victory. And, ultimately, this represented part of the move of practical reason (see Sect. 5) from pure philosophy to its normative embodiments. Fortunately, there were a few voices outside of the mainstream who together were able to grasp the extraordinary innovation of a *universalist* but *embodied* ethics. A few also recognized the ideological drift that was eating away at the political engagement of intellectuals and bending it as always in the direction of realpolitik and force, with tragic consequences and even against the best intentions of some of the leading figures of the day, most of whom ended up with the dismissal of reason expressed by the then current saying: “My party, right or wrong.”[39]

The most clear-headed voice on both fronts, both positive and critical, is undoubtedly that of Jeanne Hersch, a contemporary of Hannah Arendt and student of Karl Jaspers, whose commentary on the first article of the Declaration of 1948 we have already quoted. On the positive front we can point to the philosopher’s reflections, starting in the 1960s

[38] Habermas (2012, p. 31).

[39] Cf. Crossman (2001 [1950]), containing the famous pages of six witnesses of “the God that failed”: Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, André Gide, Louis Fischer, and Stephen Spender. On the syndrome of the captive mind, or ideological blindness, prevailing in the European post-war “Rive Gauche”, see Sect. 1 in Chap. 5.

(therefore, over half a century before the quoted text by Habermas), on precisely that "explosive fusion of moral contents with the medium of law" in the Universal Declaration of 1948—reflections that arose from a real debate among the discordant voices of the world and its cultures. This is a debate documented in the extraordinary collection of testimonies on the lived experience of the value of personal dignity (and on the lived experience of violations of this value), *Birthright of Man: An Anthology of Texts on Human Rights*,[40] a book that has been translated into many languages. As director of UNESCO's philosophy division (from 1966 to 1968), Jeanne Hersch decided to commit the organization's resources to this bold project of experimental phenomenology on axiological experience. She asked representatives of every country to send her texts taken from their traditions from before 1948 "in which they thought a sense of the rights of human creatures, in any form, could be found."[41] This was a kind of "field test" of the much-debated question: Is there really a universal that serves as the foundation for "human rights"? Or is it, again, as many maintain today, merely an expression of one ethos among others, the liberal and Western one—an expression, not of universalism, but of moral particularism?

How, then, does Hersch respond to the question of whether the idea of human rights are, or are not, limited to a particular ethos, that of the liberal West?

> If we wonder about the universality of the concept of human rights within different cultures, we clearly must answer: no, this concept has not been universal […]. Yet there is a universal demand which can be perceived everywhere. Something is due to human beings just because of their being humans […] the acknowledgement of a dignity that they claim because they consciously strive for their future, and because their lives find in this a sense of which they are prepared to pay for. […] Every human wants to be acknowledged as such. If acknowledgement is refused to them, they can suffer from that to the point that sometimes they prefer to die.[42]

[40] Hersch (1969).
[41] Hersch (1990).
[42] Hersch (1990, p. 109).

Therefore, there is a "universal demand": but there is also a conflict of religious, cultural, and ethnic identities. What strikes Hersch is the fundamental problem found in our multicultural societies: How is it possible to have both justice—that is, the recognition of what is due to each human being as such, universally and without qualifications (something that, as we have seen, the Declaration makes explicit)—and pluralism, that is, not only the existence but also the recognition of different and conflicting religious and cultural identities? How can both of these things be kept together? If we cannot answer this question, if we do not show that the Declaration responds to a requirement that is universally felt and is not the expression of only one of the cultural identities in question—"ours"—then we will end up devaluing it and justifying skepticism about human rights (as grounded on universal and not just "Western" values). As is happening again today.

Answering this "foundational" philosophical question is as urgent as answering an apparently more concrete question: Why—even though today they are universally recognized—are human rights universally violated? Actually, according to Hersch, we cannot answer the second question without also answering the first.

That human beings live naturally under the empire of force is already an answer to the second question. Forget "natural law": in nature, Hersch writes, "everything eats everything." But this observation also hints at an answer to the first question, the more "philosophical" one. From the moment they experience coercive force, human beings are not limited to suffering like other animals: they require that they should not be coerced—that they should not be treated like animals. They require justice, that is to say: they require that their "right to be human" should be recognized. "To be human: here is quite a proud demand!" as it is put in one of the ancient texts of the world anthology referenced above. They require, that is, to be recognized as free beings.

Hersch's central insight involves the double nature of human freedom, and that the answer to the question of the foundation of human rights can be found in this insight. To be free is to be capable of, and in some cases to be ready to sacrifice one's life for, something still more valuable—this life's meaning, its reasons, God. Regrettably, it is also to be willing to sacrifice others' lives for the same purpose. To be "a human being" is to

be capable of this "absolute" commitment, as symbolized by Antigone. But this commitment to the absolute has a "wild," archaic origin.

Our fear of the incursion of the divine into human affairs is based on an awareness of this origin—and modern fundamentalism has demonstrated that this fear is well founded.

So, it looks like we are still without an answer to the second question. Why should a person whose ethos comes from his or her religion recognize the rights of human beings? What possible reason for doing this could the person ever have? How can we claim an absolute requirement based on human rights if this same absolute requirement can turn against human rights?

There is a last step we need to take. After all, until now we have been philosophizing. But I think that Hersch really found something out by starting from embodied reason—that is, through the actual encounter with the cultures and answers that the Universal Declaration urged.

A bow to a form of transcendence called "God" certainly cannot justify the sacrifice of the life of others (even moral life, not only physical life). What is at work, instead, is the determination, devoid of spiritual experience and based on the will-to-power, to possess this transcendence or to subjugate others in its name. "Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" is the precept that describes the nature of transcendence: something unpossessed and not possessable. *Noli me tangere* translates this first precept into a second one that forbids the hands of man from commanding the body or the life of another human creature in the name of God. It is the *habeas corpus*, the Magna Carta, of spiritual experience: you can live in the presence of the Absolute, but you cannot act in the name of the Absolute.

But the live core of every religion lies in the experience of transcendence—of that which transcends all human categories and because of this cannot be named by human words, nor used in human wars. Spiritual growth is learning to disentangle unpossessable transcendence from the political exploitation of the Absolute. Digging into the heart of most religions—and surely of the three "religions of the Book", Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—we find something like the biblical formulation, "Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"—that is to say, do not appropriate God's name toward human ends: recognize that

you do not yourself possess it, less still can you claim the right to talk to others in God's name.

Hersch saw the anti-idolatrous, and, thus, at its core anti-ideological, potential that every spiritual culture carries within itself. Did we not learn about this potential from within our own history? Christians, after all, have filled their history with "murderous words," to use Simone Weil's formulation, referring to those value-terms, such as "beauty," "the good," "truth"—that used to be identified with the "names of God": in whose name many were murdered.[43] This text by Weil, by the way, is likely to have first inspired this idea in Hersch. Why should recognition of this abuse of the name of God be reserved solely for "our own" God? After all, the prohibition of abusing the name of God exists for the other religions too.

We can see that this insight is at the heart of a fundamental idea Hersch forms about democracy—and about Berlin's "negative liberty"—by looking at another passage of hers:

> This void that it is the duty of politics to conserve, this void that gives their sense to the Laws, the Parliaments, Justice, to security, public health and welfare, to all the social measures that lower physical risks and increase moral responsibilities: has this void any value for the people? This void, made to be filled by the moral liberty, will be filled? Are people willing to enjoy this freedom to fill it? And will they […] be able to love this moral freedom, for the sake of themselves and of the others, enough to stand up for it as they should, politically and morally […], engaging their time and exposing their bodies, their goods and the thing itself which each of them has given his liberty to? This is the ultimate question. Whether this "empty" freedom isn't a too heavy burden for humans.[44]

And we can see what also happens to this thing called the "West," when it neglects the daily exercise of anti-idolatrous asceticism which serves to free the space of unpossessed transcendence at the very heart of universalism and liberal and democratic culture. When it puts God back onto its flags. We see it in Italy, among the least advanced countries in Europe in terms of putting into practice the principle of the secular state,

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[43] Weil, "Power of Words" [1937] in Weil (1962).

[44] Hersch (1956, p. 119).

and with its legislation on the rights of the person relative to the body, birth, and death. We see it elsewhere, in the blood spilled by Western democracy's bombers.

Hersch discovered the path that potentially frees any theological culture from the risk of theo-politics—a kind of fusion, or confusion, of religion and politics—and opens it to cosmopolitan hope. If this path has been revealed to us, it is not by chance, but because the very nature of an openness toward transcendence lies in not stopping halfway, in not getting stuck in the morass from which we emerge with difficulty as moral subjects, if we are able to listen to the need for the absolute, to understand it, to follow it all the way. But we know how deeply we must delve into spiritual experience and theological meditation in order to see this simple, painfully obvious, axiological truth: that all the value of the divine is twisted into its diabolical opposite when put to use and appropriated by those who purport to speak and act in its name.

Hersch's insight therefore gives international politics a precise practical directive: where it is truly universal, our reason is not a substitute for religion; it should not compete with the religions of the world and above all should not humiliate them in order to assert itself. The path toward universal reason—made up by our fallible, but also always falsifiable, reasons—passes through the very heart of every religion; but it requires delving deeply into this heart. Only then will the willingness to die for the Absolute no longer be confused with the readiness to kill for it, and liberty will no longer be confused with violence. Only then will each religion educate its faithful towards secularism.

Here is an example. There have been monstrous executions broadcast around the world by caliphs promoting a new kind of fundamentalism, and attacks by a handful of terrorists against innocent bystanders in many European cities. There was a massacre of journalists armed only with pencils. Much of the world considered the Paris march behind "Je suis Charlie"[45] as the sign of an exemplary reaction. This was right, if it meant

[45] The reference is to the slaughter of the whole editorial staff of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015. Speaking of attitudes toward the other's religious sentiments, it may be of interest to quote the letter by which Karl Popper refused to sign the world petition by the Society of Authors in relation to Salman Rushdie: "Surely nobody of us wishes to consent to the Ayatollah and his instigation to murder […]. But few of us would defend the offense that Rushdie committed relative to the religious believers" (Popper 2008 [1995], p. 307).

"I would defend freedom of expression with my life." But wrong, actually an expression of axiological illiteracy, if meant as a claim of freedom to offend, hurt, and humiliate other people's religious sentiments. Freedom of expression is such that it can only be limited by one's own moral conscience, and certainly not by the law: at least for those who, like Voltaire, believed that one must be ready to die even to defend another person's freedom to express ideas one abhors. As happened to Ahmed Merabet, a Muslim who died as a policeman of the French Republic. He was entrusted the task of defending the freedom those journalists had to have, even to express ideas that he himself would perhaps have abhorred. We have no idea whether he would have intimately paid allegiance to Voltaire. Even so, anyone can now claim "Je suis Ahmed." Merabet's sacrifice seems to me the most heroic comment on Hersch's quote above, on the "void that it is the duty of politics to conserve." A humble public servant died to safeguard the truly "sacred" intangibility of this void "made to be filled with the moral freedom" of each person, and only with this.

Earlier we said that Hersch's inspiration for this idea—one that also is rooted in Voltaire, who is well represented in her *Birthright of Man*—came from Simone Weil, to whom Hersch had dedicated a popular class in Geneva in the 1960s. And here is some evidence for this, to conclude an argument that should allow us to see the real agreement of Weil's thesis on the idea of value at the center of philosophy, which opened the previous chapter, with Dworkin's thesis on the coherence of the axiological universe—and in particular with his thesis on the second condition (referenced above) for a legitimate government: "It must respect fully the responsibility and right of each person to decide for himself how to make something valuable of his life." It will be easier to remember this piece of evidence with the help of a visual image.

In the garden of UNESCO's historic headquarters in Paris, there is a small building for meditation—cylindrical in shape and empty. It was commissioned from the Japanese architect Tadao Ando in celebration of the 50th anniversary of UNESCO's constitution. There may be no better way to give a sense of what one experiences when stopping there for a few moments than this:

> If we examine closely not only the Middle Ages of Christendom, but all the really creative civilizations, we notice how each one, at any rate for a time, had at its very center an empty space reserved for the purely supernatural, the reality that lies outside this world. Everything else was oriented towards this empty space.[46]

This quote is from Simone Weil's 1934 essay "Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression." This way of thinking about the empty space that great civilizations reserve to the purely "supernatural"—a void toward which everything else is oriented—becomes dominant in Weil's last works written in London, when in a matter of months there was a massive flourishing of texts "toward a new civilization"—that is, for the refounding of Europe after the last world war. Among these works we find that which is perhaps Weil's masterpiece: *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind*,[47] written in the last year of her short life (1942–1943).

8 Philosophers and Declarations of Rights: Second Inquiry

Another among the few philosophers who were deeply struck by the Universal Declaration of 1948, much like Kant had been by the Principles of 1789, was Norberto Bobbio who, in this context, re-read all of modernity, from the Enlightenment to the twentieth century, as the "age of rights," culminating in what he recognized as a revolution of historic scope that he defined as

> a unique demonstration that a value system can be considered to be founded on humanity and thus acknowledged by it: the proof is in the general consensus over its validity. Advocates of natural law would have spoken of "*consensus omnium gentium*" or concerning a given set of values [...]. Only after the Declaration can we obtain the historical certainty that humanity in its entirety, shares some common values, and finally believe in

[46] Weil (2001), p. 158.

[47] Weil (1952 [1949]).

> the universality of these values in a way which is historically legitimate, i.e., that by universal we mean not an objective reality, but subjectively accepted by the universe of humanity.[48]

Here we come back to the issue that divides the hedgehogs from the foxes: universality of such values or particularism of one ethos, culture, or tradition that has in fact (and by means other than reason—by greater political and economic power) ended up imposing itself on others.

We can notice Bobbio's caution in suspending judgment and limiting himself to the only "legitimate" position for a historian (who sticks to the facts). But what does Bobbio the (legal) philosopher say? He continues to maintain his philosophically skeptical suspension of judgment. Despite making some adjustments over time, he never denies his skepticism with regard to the problem of the "foundation of human rights." He argues that "the two dogmas of naïve ethical rationalism" consist in believing that (1) values can be proved like theorems, and (2) it suffices to have provided a demonstration to secure their enactment.[49] So, he does not seem to conceive of a rational foundation in other terms than through a "naïve" ethical rationalism, that he identifies with a natural law approach. He concludes: "The fundamental problem concerning human rights today is not so much how to justify them, but how to protect them. This problem is political, not philosophical."[50]

This is a skeptical thesis in the proper sense of the term: there is no possible justification or verification of the principles about values and, therefore, of value judgments. The idea that where values are concerned there is no way of assessing what is true or false—that such matters therefore remain outside the jurisdiction of reason—directly contradicts Dworkin's thesis quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

After Isaiah Berlin's case, this skepticism represents a particularly significant example of what, in the broadest sense, we have referred to as the "retreat of Socrates" throughout the entire twentieth century. It is worth remembering that a kind of skepticism has always been at the very heart

[48] Bobbio (1996, pp. 13–15).

[49] Ibid., pp. 8–9.

[50] Ibid., p. 10.

of philosophical thought. The skeptic is the philosopher's alter ego—like the nonbeliever, for the believer—and we must confront this fact on a daily basis if we are to reason without bias. And it is, indeed, in this confrontation that Socrates enters the scene—in the never-ending effort to refute the skeptic's arguments, though always provisionally and until proven otherwise—and not by settling into a kind of conceptual peace, maybe even with a sad smile of disenchantment. Indeed, Antonio Gramsci's advice to intellectuals, inviting them to "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will," seems to fit Bobbio's attitude much better than a Socratic line of argument. In fact, what sense does it make to say that the problem of human rights "today lies not so much in justifying them, as in protecting them"? How can we read, if not in skeptical terms, assertions like: "It is not a philosophical problem, but a political one?"[51]

Of course, we can agree that the knowledge of what is right is not sufficient to put it into practice, but this is certainly not a good reason to consider this knowledge unnecessary and even undesirable. In fact, if the problem is political, and if, ultimately, we pursue politics on the basis of our commitment to (given) values, and if we adhere to these values based, not on reason and experience, but simply on faith, what can we object to the violators of human rights whose acts are based on their own faith? Preaching against them might only be a rhetorical exhortation, unless it were just a matter of will founded on the efficacy of force. And, in fact, since Bobbio we have witnessed a new wave of skepticism with regard to the universalism of the principles of the Declaration of 1948: not only among philosophers questioning their universality, but, much more significantly, among non-Western national governments refusing to acknowledge them. On the one hand, some have returned to speaking the language of religious or cultural conflict;[52] on the other, some have spoken of human rights as politics, where the grand illusion that human rights are above politics is labeled as "idolatry."[53]

This represents a philosophical outlook that contrasts the one that "takes rights seriously," to use Dworkin's formulation. That it is necessary

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[51] Ibid., p. 16.

[52] Huntington (1993, 2011 [1996]).

[53] Ignatieff (2004).

to "take them seriously," not only with the will, but with that part of us that aspires to knowledge: this is the hedgehog's program—the opposite of, even if in no way deaf to, the caustic irony of the foxes. "Taking them seriously" is no sheer act of the will: it is a research program on the value of values. But to conclude this point, the contrast between Dworkin and Bobbio can, perhaps, serve to illustrate how wide and variegated the twentieth-century spread of axiological skepticism has been.

Bobbio's form of skepticism about practical reason has nothing whatsoever in common with the political realism so praised by ancient and modern followers of Callicles, much less with such forms of totalitarian thought as the state worship preached by Giovanni Gentile, the mythology and destiny of the German people displayed by Martin Heidegger, or the political theology of Carl Schmitt.

Like Isaiah Berlin, Norberto Bobbio, personally a left-wing liberal, belongs to the liberal foxes, a race which does not have anything in common with such illiberal wolves as the last-mentioned figures. From this point of view the intellectual history of twentieth-century Italy, whose lights and shadows Bobbio himself has masterfully described in two of his books,[54] seems to share with that of Europe the fragile epistemic foundations of political liberalism and of liberal socialism—that is, the absence of a program of axiological research (analogous to that of Dworkin's) that could serve as the foundation for political philosophy (as well as for the philosophy of law and for moral philosophy).

Here, indeed, we are faced with a painful fact of the past century's history of ideas. When philosophers finally went back to asking about the "theory of justice," that is, when Rawls refounded political philosophy as the theory of the just society, the Western philosophical world had divided into two major branches, "analytical" and "continental," a fracture that the absurd opposition between a continent and a method never helped to illuminate. Bobbio is an example par excellence of how the best masters—masters not only of logical and analytical but, as in his case, also moral rigor, and men of undeniable goodwill—simply distrusted the turn that "continental philosophy" had taken: "the pure, sublime Philosopher, the one who, incurious about the small things, remains

[54] Bobbio (1986, 1984).

intent on resolving the great problem, the problem of Being," and went on to fortify the ranks of analytical foxes. This is how Norberto Bobbio puts it in a letter from 1961 to Enzo Paci, the philosopher who made Husserl's phenomenology known in Italy, in which he distances himself not only from Paci's thought but also from his own youthful research that had led him to write two of the, still today, clearest essays on the phenomenological method:

> While working analytically, I persuaded myself that, in order to understand the world surrounding us, the concepts worked out by the particular sciences are sufficient. The philosophers' job is a work of comparison, adjustment, focus control. It is neither a new perspective nor a new and different method; if anything, it is the spelling out of some new hypothesis which will have to be verified. In this sense it seemed to me that we were on the right track, here in Italy. There comes phenomenology setting itself up as a new method, a new perspective, and it turns everything upside-down, including philosophy which had just managed to set itself aright, and it once more invites young people who were at last going sober to philosophical orgies, and has them once again pulling everything out of the subject, as in Gentile's time.[55]

But if it were only a question of method, how could we not agree? How could we not prefer well-defined questions to the "great problem of Being?" Fifty years after the worst "betrayal of the intellectuals"—Heidegger's betrayal of the Socratic legacy—Heidegger's disciples continued to dominate the teaching of philosophy "on the Continent": but the foxes, justifiably nauseated, limited themselves to avoiding "the great problem of Being." And they did so all over Europe, mostly without opposing the slightest argument to the dominating Heideggerian academic orthodoxy smuggling itself as "phenomenology" (we shall return to this issue in Sects. 1, 8, and 9 in Chap. 5). This silence as well has been, in its way, a "conversion to reality"—having at least all the appearance of a homage paid to the existing academic powers. In other words, they

[55] Bobbio (2013, my translation). The letter is archived as ANB 3091 at the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti in Turin. See also Bobbio (2018) [1934].

seemed not to realize that most of them were giving up on the role of Socrates against Gorgias, or of the philosopher against the sophist.

In Chapter 3 (especially Sect. 4) I discussed a technical sense of "being a sophist," defining sophistry as the deliberate refusal to respect epistemic values by subjecting one's statements to the norms grounded on them: a style of discourse (more exactly, of "representative speech acts" in Searle's terminology[56]) that breaks the pragmatic conditions of rational discussion. In the next chapter I shall argue that there is a subclass of axiological skeptics that qualify as sophists, in this technical sense, and that the real, dramatic problem with what had been called "continental philosophy" is the extent to which neo-sophistry has permeated both the academic world and the sphere of public discourse, smuggled in under the name and the prestige of "philosophy." This is not just a matter of words: for even sophistry may have a significant role in public debate, as long as it stimulates philosophers to sharpen their methods for abiding by epistemic values in their research and arguments. This was the point of emphasizing, with Husserl, Socrates' "response to the Sophists who denied any reasonable meaning to life" (as we did earlier in Sects. 2, 3, and 4 in Chap. 3, an argument to which we will return in Sect. 4 in Chap. 5).

What happened instead—apropos "continental" and "analytical" philosophy—is that the faults of sophistry were imputed to "continental" philosophy, as such. As we shall see, a victim par excellence of this misunderstanding was classical phenomenology. Bobbio's case is just paradigmatic of a tragic misunderstanding that haunted classical phenomenology for half a century, lumping it together with Heideggerian "philosophical orgies."

Let us draw some conclusions from the analysis provided in this chapter. We should now be able to recognize that what separates the liberal foxes from the illiberal wolves is not simply a question of method. It is a question of ethics. The wolves were the ones who had disdainfully denied any respect—by the same move—not only for epistemic values, but also

[56] Searle (1979) suggests that speech acts consist of five general classifications for the functions or illocution of speech acts; these are declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. In a representative speech act, the speaker's intention is to assert the speaker's belief.

for the form of life that freely subjects itself to the "jurisdiction of reason," and for the subject of this form of life, the moral, reasonable, sensitive, and embodied agent, the "sovereign" person whose liberty abides by the "law's empire." The wolves had violently attacked those same principles that were later solemnly put forth in declarations and constitutions: the equal dignity of human beings, their responsibility for their lives, ethical universalism, cosmopolitical legality against the arbitrariness of force, and potentially extended to the geopolitical wilds. The most famous among these wolves was Martin Heidegger, who in France and Italy had never been without fervent followers. And for 50 years his teachings would continue to dominate the European continent virtually unchallenged—that is, until the publication of those *Black Notebooks* which reopened the debate on his relationship with Nazism. We will take up this discussion in the next chapter.

Part of the drama perhaps lies in the fact that the axiological skepticism of the liberal foxes is in no way a radical alternative to the neo-sophistry of the wolves. Neither of the two types of retreat from practical reason can answer the question: Why should I recognize rights other than those of the strongest? Why should I fight discrimination, by race or otherwise? Neither of the two can try to show the reason to those who do not see it, case by case—the neo-sophist wolves, the Martin Heideggers and Carl Schmitts, cannot because, far from fighting discrimination in all its forms, they supported and justified it; and the honest foxes cannot because, as Hans Kelsen, the true master of Norberto Bobbio and the prince of European legal formalism, writes:

> In its literal meaning [...] "justice" stands for an absolute value. Its content cannot be determined by the Pure Theory of Law or, indeed, arrived at by way of rational cognition at all—as the history of human intellectual endeavor demonstrates, with its failure over a millennium to resolve this problem.[57]

In particular, our honest fox cannot even start looking for the experimental evidence, yielding following reason for *not* recognizing the right

[57] Kelsen (1934, p. 16).

of the strongest: “Because it is true—until proven otherwise—that the value of equal dignity is superior to that of hierarchy in dignity; in other words, that a society without discrimination is better or more just than a discriminatory society.” And we come full circle. And even the hedgehog that has followed us to this point may be left speechless when faced with the combined invasion of skeptical foxes, decisionist wolves, and dancing moths.

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5

Truth Suspended

Culture, in fact, is not the terrain of truth,
but of the dispute around truth.
—Nicola Chiaromonte, *Tempo Presente*

A number of different forms of axiological skepticism have been prevalent in twentieth-century Europe: historical determinism, realpolitik ideology, tragic visions, nihilism, and many kinds of ideological fideism—all of which had their place in the 1915–1945 period, the so-called European Civil War.[1] As Norberto Bobbio observed in the 1980s, most of these forms of axiological skepticism are the progeny of Nietzsche, "with whom a new disoriented Left has been flirting for some time now."[2] Yet, in the decades of the so-called "post-ideological" era, to which Bobbio refers, the Left thrived on postmodern relativism as well, at least in continental

[1] See Traverso (2017 [2006]) for an analysis of the richness and diversity of the historical concept of the European Civil War 1914–1945, adopted by several authors, *before* and after Nolte 1997 [1987], a book that became sinisterly famous for flirting with Holocaust denial. Ernst Nolte was a former student of Martin Heidegger, whom he acknowledges as a major influence.

[2] Bobbio (1996c).

R. De Monticelli, *Towards a Phenomenological Axiology*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73983-6_5

Europe. And during the preceding age—the Cold War period—the European Left was no better off as far as respect for truth in factual and axiological matters was concerned. This whole chapter is mostly devoted to this persisting, tragically awkward relationship between *will* and *truth* in contemporary philosophical-political thought: the inquiry into influential forms of axiological skepticism, which started in the previous chapter, unfolds into a survey of its post-Hegelian and post-Heideggerian ideological varieties, and then contrasts them with what I will call here "the free spirits." By "free spirits" I mean those thinkers who avoided the ideological traps of the Cold War and devoted their best thoughts to the renewal of Europe and its civilization, opening new paths in the XXth century's axiological thought. They all "became acquainted with evil," as Tzvetan Todorov wrote of his own experience,[3] and were able to draw on that experience to develop new axiological knowledge. Nicola Chiaromonte, the author of the aphorism in epigraph, that inaugurated Tempo Presente, the journal he founded in 1956 with the Italian writer Ignazio Silone, then world-renown, has been a typical representative of this family: most of them got to know Simone Weil through him (see note 22). He was acquainted, among others, with Hannah Arendt, Mary Mc Carthy, Albert Camus, Czeslaw Milosz, André Malraux: all of them regarded him as an inspiring Socratic figure in the world of European antifascism (in English, he only published *The Paradox of History* (Chiaromonte 1985)).

But what about the (apparently) non-skeptical, Rawlsian alternative to the axiological cognitivism that I defend in this book? The evolution of Rawls's thought in the 1990s presents a striking case of "conversion to reality." We shall address this before focusing more theoretically on the topic of will and truth in Sect. 5. The remaining sections address, respectively, the sources of our *pars construens*: the bold theory of axiological reason that classical phenomenology puts forward, with the new civilizational project it entails, as well as a final survey of Heidegger's thought, which had such an undisputed dominance on twentieth-century continental philosophy, and is still there, hardly shaken by the publication of his *Black Notebooks*.

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[3] Todorov (1989).

1 The Rive Gauche, Yesterday and Today

What Raymond Aron called "*l'opium des intellectuels*," referring to the appeal that Bolshevist ideology had exercised on European left-wing intellectuals, apparently found new consumers, despite a drop in quality of the doctrine, often mixing up old class-theoretic and new communitarian and identitarian issues in the twenty-first century resurgence of populisms.[4] It is especially striking to see all the old slogans of a doctrinaire Marxism added to the new ones directed at "neoliberalism." (It is no surprise that a *Dissent* article in 2018 characterized "neoliberalism" as "the linguistic omnivore of our times, a neologism that threatens to swallow up all the other words around it."[5]) The whole mythology of a quasi-demonic capitalist will to power, with its angels of evil (technology and finance) globally conspiring to a universal "machination," continues to be widely influential, not only on social media networks, but also in some temples of academic debate, in Paris or in New York, where a Foucauldian reduction of all normativity to a diffused and impersonal will of power and its "*dispositifs*" or mechanisms is still very influential.[6] I suggest the formula "politicization of axiology" for this contemporary version of axiological skepticism. The term "politicization" should convey the idea that

[4] It is not easy to single out individually recognizable and popular authors from a galaxy of intellectual influencers crowding the Web, and reeling off, without even a shadow of perplexity, litanies about the global machinations of capitalism, punctuated by the most illiberal praise for the worst in contemporary politics, whether it be for redoubtable autocrats (so long as they are hostile to American imperialism) or for xenophobic European politicians (as long as they are hostile to the European Union and to its economic policies).

[5] Rogers (2018).

[6] The hint to the academic circles and Critical Thought in France or the USA refers to some recent endorsements—that might run the risk of being not so "critical" and not so thoughtful—of the yellow vest movement by Etienne Balibar and Toni Negri, easy to find on the Web, where the speakers repeatedly insist on the "political system," which would be better specified as "the government of capital." Cf. the transcriptions of their contributions to the debate organized by legal and political theorist Bertrand Harcourt, in Paris on January 16, 2019: http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/praxis1313/7-13/?cn-reloaded=1. Harcourt himself steps aside from full support, declaring himself as simply a "*compagnon de route*" of the yellow vests, yet offering a flamboyant example of postmodern relativism in what might be read as a justification of street violence: "After all, crime is political. Penal law is political practice as Foucault so brilliantly demonstrated in *Penal Theories and Institutions* in 1972."

there is no matter of truth and disagreement in value issues, but only of force and conflict.

As we have repeatedly remarked, ignorance of public ethics does not simply consist in transgressing it, but also in the impulse toward a global and acquiescent explanation of evil that leads us to ignore our own responsibility for the behaviors and choices that contribute to consolidating the way power is distributed, exercised, and controlled. Of course, we know that the consequences of our actions often go beyond and betray our intentions. But rather than acquiescing in the idea that there are impersonal, quasi-mythological powers (call them what you will: the history of being, destiny, technology, neoliberalism) that plot and will, playing with us and eluding us with a "false consciousness" that needs to be "unmasked," ethical reasoning would require that we take a hard look at the evidence and do the hard work of critically examining public behaviors and choices, disentangling the threads of actual responsibility, holding the real actors accountable, and looking for the appropriate corrective policies.[7]

Apparently, the young who are now rediscovering the global explanations familiar to many forms of Marxist philosophy remain entirely unaware of the "captive mind effect"[8] that its language had not only on the intelligentsia of the Eastern European countries under Stalin's empire, but also on that of the Western side of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. Even the wave of renewal in 1968, vindicating "all power to the imagination," was largely under the spell of the Frankfurt School, which, with its demonization of the Enlightenment and modernity, had not set most minds free from the most frequent self-deceptions of post-Hegelian philosophers: passing off an essentially moral demand (the thirst for justice) as an issue of social "science," and moreover, passing off science as disclosing the reasons of "History," with a capital "H," whatever this dubious, ferocious divinity might be.

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[7] Even sociological phenomena as the impressive success—on social networks—of social-nationalist opinion leaders should not go unnoticed to researchers inquiring into the extent to which conspiracy theories of evil, rooted in twentieth-century stereotypes about modernity, can shape young, uncultivated minds.

[8] Miłosz (1953). See above, Sect. 6 in Chap. 3.

However, there is at least one big difference between the ideologists of contemporary populism and those of the previous generations, especially those who came of age during the 1960s. Populists often praise the nation state in a way that was entirely alien to former generations on the progressive side. This very alarming feature, nationalism, typically tends to blur the difference between left and right radicalism and confirms a tendency that underscores the salience of our axiologically based criticism. The less one's value commitment (e.g., political) is taken up based on a personal axiological experience (liable to trial and error, discussion and refutation), the more it is deferred to communitarian, identitarian-political expression, and the more blurred become those distinctions between different spheres of values and norms (e.g., ethics, politics, religion) that characterize modern secular and liberal thought. As Aurel Kolnai, a very lucid phenomenologist of politics and culture had already remarked in the 1930s, a trend toward tribalism is always lurking in national populism, as a psychological foundation of the "total state."[9]

This trend may take more or less refined forms: it takes a surprisingly cultivated form today in Italy, the country in which Fascism originated, as a reappraisal of the most illiberal of the Italian idealists, Giovanni Gentile, the author of *The Doctrine of Fascism* in 1932,[10] in a vein that utterly ignores Norberto Bobbio's final judgment about Gentile's way of thinking:

> This identification of politics with morality (which was, in fact, a subordination of individual morality to "public" morality or politics) led Gentile to deny every distinction between the sphere of the individual and that of the state, that is, to reject one of the presuppositions on which the liberal

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[9] Kolnai, "The Total State and Civilization" [1933], in Kolnai (2013, p. 45). Emmanuel Faye has recently acknowledged the enduring value of Kolnai's 1938 work on the affective, intellectual, sociological, and psychological foundations of Nazism, by pointing out the light that Kolnai's axiological analyses shed on the "political Heideggerianism of Ahmad Fahrid in Iran, stigmatizing the 'Western intoxication', and that of Aleksander Dugin in Russland, looking for a 'new beginning' to be found in the East" (Faye 2016, p. 318).

[10] Fusaro (2014). Gentile is presented here as the most authentic and inspiring source of Gramsci's thought.

> state is founded. He came to this negation with another one of the formulations known to him, arguing that the state is not external to the individual, but is *in interiore homine*, and everyone, willing or not, carries it within.[11]

A much more popular supporter of totalitarian adventures that the European left has cleared is Carl Schmitt, Hitler's main legal adviser, whose reputation does not seem to be tarnished by the evidence of the dishonesty of some of his acts, like the fatal one by which, in 1933, he legitimated Hitler's suppression of the Weimar constitution.[12] Schmitt also approved Hitler's subsequent anti-Semitic legislation and the preparations for war. Continental philosophers today keep echoing Schmitt's doctrines about financial capital and technocracy.

They have their masters. Giorgio Agamben, a disciple of Schmitt and Foucault, widely read throughout the world, writes regarding democracy and its "ambiguity" as follows:

> The misunderstanding that consists in regarding government as simple executive power is one of the worst, most consequential errors in the history of Western politics. This has brought us to the fact that political reflection on modernity is lost *behind empty abstractions like the law*, the general will and popular sovereignty, leaving without an answer the decisive problem […] of government and its articulation to the sovereign.[13]

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[11] Bobbio (1986 [1964], p. 23).

[12] He did it in perfect keeping with the fundamental thesis expressed in *Political Theology* (2005 [1922]): "Sovereign is he who decides the state of exception," refined by the formula of the "political recompense to the legal possession of force," with which the jurist "justified" the law of constitutional modification that gave Hitler the power to *abolish* the constitution and all parties save for the Nazi one. Already in 1931 Schmitt had affirmed that Article 48 conferred to the German leader the unconditioned faculty of suspending the constitution during a state of emergency, restoring it only at the emergency's conclusion. On the basis of Article 48, the president had this power as "protector of the Constitution." It was thus impossible to interpret the article in this sense, without the invention of that formula that is in itself contradictory (if power had been legally conquered, what sense did that "recompense" have? Where was the state of emergency?). This lack of intellectual honesty did not prevent several widely read left-wing intellectuals from endorsing and further developing Schmitt's political decisionism. See Cacciari (2018 [2013]).

[13] Agamben (2011, pp. 1–5). My italics.

This amounts to asserting that the "spirit of law" (Montesquieu), the separation of powers, or even the *rule of law* that is opposed to the arbitrariness of the sovereign are all "empty abstractions." Everything that is *ideal* in modern political philosophy, from Montesquieu to our time, can be reduced to such "empty abstractions." An equally "empty abstraction," then, would be any political theory envisaging *normative institutions*: a constitution, a system of forms and procedures that embodies the exercise of sovereignty and ensures the protection of minorities, a parliamentary function, or even simply *laws*. So, from Agamben's perspective, the undeniably critical state of representative and participatory democracy in several European countries is supposed to be the fault, not of the habit of adjusting the norm to the facts and the law to the power, but of the moralist Montesquieu and his descendants, with their absurd pretense that what is *not* should be.

Speaking of Schmitt, it is truly curious that his (strikingly mediocre) essay on *The Tyranny of Values* had immensely more success among the ranks of European *progressivism* of the second half of the twentieth century than the authors who were in its sights and provided its polemical pretexts, such as Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann. These were apparently not read, not even by Schmitt (who confuses the notions they had carefully distinguished: values and goods, values and ends, values and aims, values and will, values and feelings—all notions to which we will turn in the final chapter). Schmitt, after all, subscribed to the Nietzschean notion of value without the slightest critical doubt. That is, he adhered wholly, as Weber had, to a radical axiological skepticism, which rejects the objectivity of values to such an extent as to entirely deprive value judgments of truth conditions. According to Schmitt, the ethics of values is just "tyranny," because value "enforces unconditional obedience" and thus forces action and judgment. In fact, "values are ends," and the end "justifies the means," and thus, the noblest value can justify the most abject of actions.[14]

[14] Schmitt 2018 [1959].

Unfortunately, these assertions have found their way into the typical progressive mentality.[15] However, they all derive from a lack of analysis of value experience, and it is only in this phenomenological darkness that the claim that value commitment is always and necessarily blind faith can have some semblance of credibility. On the other hand, how can one characterize a given action as *abject* (and the historical examples are hardly missing if we think of so-called "humanitarian" wars) except through a judgment *of value*, which is undoubtedly in many cases well-founded and justifiable, and affirms precisely that the action does *not* at all embody the positive value in the name of which it is carried out? Of course, no axiological skeptic will let himself be troubled by the self-confutation that his *value* judgment on alleged value commitments implies, and the axiological nihilist even less so. All sophists admit contradictions.

2 A Living Alternative: The Free Spirits and Their Axiological Reasons

Against this background, I shall at least mention one still-vital alternative line of thought that flourished in the immediate aftermath of the war but was utterly neglected in European intellectual circles and is still far from receiving the attention it deserves. Mentioning it is in order here, as it represents an isolated but brilliant counter-example to the "retreat of philosophy" that paradoxically accompanied the "normative incarnation of practical reason," as described in the previous chapter. I am thinking of the work of Altiero Spinelli, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, who not only played a decisive role in its actual creation but has

[15] A very recent review of a new English translation of Schmitt's essay exemplifies this trend. Its author argues that "Schmitt thus provides an apt characterization of the intensification of ideological conflicts and the oppressive potential of value—characteristics that derive from the metaphysical situation of value philosophy." Now what is the metaphysical situation of value philosophy? "Drawing upon Heidegger's account of the history of metaphysics, Schmitt argues that value philosophy is a reaction to the nihilism crisis of the nineteenth century, wherein the freedom and 'religious-ethical-juridical' responsibility of the human were threatened by causal, value-free science." That is, Scheler and Hartmann are presented as a kind of Taleban or fundamentalist, nostalgic for a theological foundation of legal institutions, and the reviewer seems to heartily endorse this strange diagnosis. Sliwowski (2020, pp. 36–38).

been by far its most systematic political, ethical and philosophical theoretician, even if historians, with very few exceptions, seem to have entirely forgotten about him.[16] A case study on him would be all the more interesting for our axiology because in both directions, the practical and the theoretical, his work provides an outstanding example of how increases in axiological *knowledge*, based on concrete experiences, can produce both innovative thoughts in normative disciplines (political theory) and spectacular changes in the actual world. If we had the leisure to dwell upon the greatness and misery of the process of European integration from its beginning to the present, we would indeed verify the double tendency by which the normative embodiment of philosophy was accompanied by skepticism on the part of most philosophers about the very institutions that their best tradition had made possible. We would once more verify that, as the letter

[16] The most striking case is Tony Judt (2011), who manages to write a (skeptical) book on the history of the EU without mentioning, even cursorily, Altiero Spinelli, the founder of the European Federalist Movement, that in the aftermath of the Second World War powerfully contributed—on the ideal level—to the foundation of today's EU. Spinelli is the main author (with Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni) of the Ventotene Manifesto (Spinelli and Rossi 2013 [1941], see also Pdf online at http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1997/10/13/316aa96c-e7ff-4b9e-b43a-958e96afbecc/publishable_en.pdf), and of an impressive series of essays on European Federalism, published in several languages from 1943 to his death in 1986. The present EU is the result of the alternate success, in the context of the postwar world historical events, of either of the two main strategies that guided the pro-European movements and leaders from the very beginning: first, the original political and *constitutional* project of a Federal state—the United States of Europe, in Spinelli's project, today vigorously supported by Juergen Habermas; and, second, the functionalistic thought going back, essentially, to Jean Monnet (1888–1979), who, thanks to the unconditional support of the French Foreign Affairs Minister, Robert Schuman, is the actual "father" of the first institutions of the EC (the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community, and EURATOM), and the man who persuaded EC governments to turn their regular summits into the European Council. There are, then, *three* periods in which the federalist idea of Europe (as opposed to the functionalistic idea that prevailed most of the time) gained momentum in a spectacular way. In the very beginning, with the direct or indirect influence of Spinelli on the political leaders Churchill, De Gasperi, and Adenauer, Europe took the steps that led from the European Community of Coal and Steel (1952) to the Treaty of Rome (1957). The middle period, of great advance, spans from the first democratic election of the European Parliament (1980) to the Draft Treaty for the European Union (1984). This is the last and most important victory of Spinelli. That was followed by a famous endorsement by France's President Mitterrand. In the third period, after Spinelli's death, his project provided an impetus for the negotiations which led first to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, and then to *a constitutional project* approved at the end of 2001 in Nice (with the Charter of Fundamental Rights), which was followed up in 2002 and 2003 by the European Convention, which established a Constitution for Europe. This project was tragically rejected by the negative results of two national referendums in 2005. The Lisbon Treaty (2007), however, keeps practically all the features of a constitution.

without the spirit is dead, democracy deprived of its spirit reduces to bureaucracy.[17] However, we would also rediscover the amazing turn that the immaterial force of an idea imparted to European history. Spinelli died in 1986, but the constitutional process toward creating a super-national democratic and federal state would not have even begun without the epic effort Spinelli made to have the Draft Treaty for the European Union approved by the Parliament, which happened in 1984.

Altiero Spinelli, this "ideal" father of the EU, was a man who spent his youth in a fascist jail meditating on the whole of European spiritual and political history, and, in particular, on the tragedy of "realized" socialism in the Soviet Union. This former communist, one of the first in Europe to see the "captive mind" effect of Soviet ideology, came out of prison with an idea of the future of Europe—and the world—which seems prophetic to us but which harbored, I think, the most profound innovation in modern political philosophy and the theory of democracy since the French Revolution: that is, the dissociation of the idea of democratic sovereignty from that of the nation.

While axiological decisionism proceeds by wiping out axiological distinctions, Spinelli's thought introduces new distinctions based on an analysis of the means available for national democracies to promote and realize their core value.

> Modern civilization has taken as its specific foundation the principle of liberty, which says that man is not a mere instrument to be used by others but that every human being must be an autonomous life center. With this definition in hand, all those aspects of social life that have not respected this principle have been placed on trial in the grand, historical process that has begun.[18]

This is the *incipit* of the Ventotene Manifesto. Words matter: Spinelli's "autonomous life center" has little if anything to do with the

[17] Against this background the recent step towards European post-COVID solidarity, with the recovery plan put forward by the "New Generations Funds," strokes the international public as a leap of EU governance in the direction of the long forgotten ideals of its charter.

[18] Spinelli and Rossi (2013 [1941], p. 75). The Manifesto, co-authored with Ernesto Rossi and—in the 1944 edition—prefaced by Eugenio Colorni, is in fact the issue of the discussions Spinelli had with his fellow anti-fascists when confined on the island of Ventotene.

disembodied subjects of the social contract in a Rawlsian setting. We cannot elaborate on this now, but the supplement of analysis, which this "autonomous life center" calls for, was furnished by one of Spinelli's supranationalist federalism's best supporters, the great entrepreneur, philosopher, and infra-national federalist, Adriano Olivetti.[19] Like Camus, Olivetti regarded beauty as an essential, not optional, feature of everyday life, and, like Simone Weil, had made labor the center of his industrial and political philosophy. Olivetti is the other axiological innovator (both practical and theoretical) who might have inspired new perspectives on social justice and sustainable economic growth and whose legacy has been, especially at the international level, equally neglected. Both men agree on the core value of modern civilization that they call "the principle of personality," in which they see the fragile normative essence of humanism, whose late realizations in human history depend on an always threatened anthropological revolution: the emancipation of humans from their tribal bonds and their cast hierarchies, their access to an examined life, capable of existential, moral, and political sovereignty.

So, what are "those aspects of social life that have not respected this principle" of liberty and personality? The first is the contrast between politics conceived as based on nation states and the global economy. Today, many believe that true democracies that are exclusively internal to single states—especially European ones—are no longer possible. That visionary man, who did not lack a perception of the real, saw it 80 years ago. Whoever doubts it should read passages like this one:

> To fight for democracy today means becoming aware that one must bring this senseless race to a halt, not only in Italy, but in all of Europe, toward a society polarized by vested interests that overcome the state and paralyze it when they are in equilibrium, and which reinforce its despotic character when a group or a coalition of groups defies its enemies and comes to power.[20]

[19] Olivetti (2014 [1945]). *L'ordine politico delle comunità* is the theoretical masterpiece of a great entrepreneur. It presents a thoroughly worked out project of a new form of democracy, where the representative component of the state is elected not only on a party basis, but also, in part, on the basis of the "concrete" territorial and working communities, and in part selected on the basis of a specific curriculum of competences. The centrality of labor, innovation, knowledge, and sustainability in his economic and political thought make it a model for our present.

[20] Spinelli (1987, pp. 105–106).

Spinelli died in 1986, after giving the decisive impulse to the constitutional process of today's EU. In all his writings, this still too virtual, and yet unique, supranational parliamentary democracy, born of an unprecedented transfer of sovereignty by its member states, is "invented" and foreseen in a form that goes beyond its present uncertain status, halfway between an intergovernmental organism and a federal state. Reading the Manifesto—and especially reading it alongside Spinelli's impassioned autobiography—gives one a feel for axiological reason in action, like nothing else does. Dwelling a while upon this collective enterprise fostered by a purely axiologically grounded political project provides one with an empirical argument against skepticism, especially now that the pandemic has lent the EU more authority regarding its member states.

Spinelli and Olivetti were among the few European "philosophers" in the middle of the Cold War—among the few, I mean, that led *ideal* rather than *ideological* battles. However, they were no professional philosophers. They were part of a kind of brotherhood of "free spirits," along with peers like Albert Camus, Ignazio Silone, Jeanne Hersch, Czeslaw Miłosz, and Nicola Chiaromonte. All of them hold that modern democracy, deep down, is rooted in classic Athenian *philosophy* much more than in its politics, that is, in the Socratic face-to-face and rational argumentation about ends and values, much more than in the "force" of the "people" (*demoi*) in the *agora*. They are thinkers who had personally suffered the effects of the dissociation of politics from ethics and logic. Their "family resemblance" is explained not only by the experience of evil and exile that many of them had to undergo but—except for Spinelli—also by the axiological thought of Simone Weil, of whom they were translators, editors, or at least devoted readers.[21] They all seem deeply aware of that worst evil

[21] I am referring to Czeslaw Miłosz, translator of several of Weil's texts into Polish (De Monticelli 2013c), but also to Albert Camus, editor of Simone Weil's first posthumous works for Gallimard, to Dwight MacDonald, Hannah Arendt, and Mary McCarthy, with whom Nicola Chiaromonte was in close contact, as was Ignazio Silone. It was Chiaromonte who brought to New York, in 1941, the issue of *Cahiers du Sud* in which Weil's essay on *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force* had been published, which subsequently appeared in *Politics* in 1945, rendered into English by Mary McCarthy. Jeanne Hersch herself lectured on Simone Weil in her courses in Geneva (see De Monticelli, ed., 2003).

that reaches into our minds: ambiguity, or "the mixture of good and evil" (Weil).

This was the age that Nicola Chiaromonte defined as "the time of bad faith,"[22] a concept that captures that specifically twentieth-century type of "mixing of good and evil" in thought, which we have called the silencing of self-consciousness, or the psychological foundation of the banality of evil (Primo Levi's "grey zone").

This thought, more specifically, confronts the enigma of an inner "metamorphosis" (to recall the starting image of this book) whose phenomenology, as we learn from a classic like Miłosz's *The Captive Mind*,[23] depicts the alteration in their intimate sphere, undergone by those who sacrifice their moral and intellectual autonomy to ideological thought. Here is how Jeanne Hersch, who, like no other Socratic thinker of the twentieth century, throws light on this enigma and describes the era of those conversions. Speaking of the "acrobatics" of dialectic and ideology, she describes a Paris where the conflict between Sartre and Camus was raging, and a majority of intellectuals reproached Camus for being unable to sacrifice his moral autonomy:

> One saw them make recourse to an intellectual virtuosity to create the semblance of continuity or synthesis wherever there was incompatibility or lack of connection […]. Fragile local articulations, subtle linguistic tricks, leaps on the dialectic trapeze, reconciling options traditionally thought hostile to one another even better than Hegel himself.[24]

The intimate relationship between ethics and logic defines "Socratic" philosophy, as the cited passage explains. Even this brief evocation of Hersch's text reminds us of the "Rive Gauche" aspect of Socrates' twentieth-century retreat from philosophy.

[22] Chiaromonte (2013).
[23] Miłosz (1953).
[24] Hersch (1956, p. x).

3 Truth Suspended, or the "Serious Problem" of John Rawls

I have evoked far too many names in an attempt to offer evidence (and counter-evidence) for the historical claim that philosophers—most of them—have withdrawn from ideality and axiology precisely in the time of philosophy's normative embodiment. However, one might object that normative political theory and, more generally, practical philosophy have moved on, relative to the state of the art we discussed by opposing cognition to construction in Sect. 6 in Chap. 4): that constructivism in practical philosophy does not—or does not always—coincide with axiological skepticism. In Chap. 4, I opposed experience and its axiological contents to the procedural forms of Kantian and Rawlsian reason. One might object that the Rawlsian justice principles that are justifiable from the "universalized" point of view of disembodied subjects do have an objective validity criterion: their acceptance by the subjects. So, in a chapter devoted to the relationship between will and truth, we ought to answer the question: Does constructivism not represent a "rational foundation of practical thought" after all, one strong enough to provide arguments against axiological skepticism?

To make a long story short: as expressed in *Political Liberalism* (2005 [1993]), Rawls's mature thought seems an act of practical reason's self-dismissal. It indeed confirms its reduction to a "political not metaphysical" theory deprived precisely of its ethical-logical backbone.[25]

What is initially most striking about this book is precisely the figure of Socrates. For Rawls, "Socrates" and "the beginning of moral philosophy" are the same thing.[26] True enough: philosophy is the name that, in Plato's dialogues, is given to the demand for justification of our beliefs—all of them, of all that exists, of all that is good, and of what must be done. This "turn" subdues morality and law to the jurisdiction of our reason and search for knowledge, subtracting it from religion, tradition, and the given customs of a specific society and culture. The ethical demand par

[25] A "political, not metaphysical" justification of political theory, as Rawls makes explicit in Rawls (1985).

[26] Rawls (2005 [1993]).

excellence becomes, with Socrates, the demand for clarity, awareness, and reason for whatever we believe, claim, or do.

Now, what prompts "the beginning of moral philosophy," Rawls asks? His answer is surprising: it is the fact that there is no competition between philosophy, at its birth, and religion, which represents a comprehensive, alternative conception of the good. There is no conflict of world visions that one needs to harmonize in a civil coexistence. There is only ancient religious mythology, with its Homeric epics, gods, and heroes, that has already declined and has been secularized, as it were, within a civil religion. In other words, philosophy need not afford conflict with other visions of the good. It can allow itself to pose the question of truth even as political thought, the thought of what values exist in a well-ordered *polis*, since it need not confront the characteristic pluralism of modern societies, starting from Christian schisms.[27] Socrates, in other words, does not have before him the "serious problem." That problem, Rawls writes, arises from "the unrealistic idea of a well-ordered society as it appears in *Theory*."[28]

Even the foremost "normativist" theorist of the twentieth century, then, suffers from what I called a conversion to reality, one that he places before our eyes in this dramatic introduction to the mature phase of his thought: "Political liberalism starts by taking to heart the absolute depth of that irreconcilable latent conflict."[29]

Nietzsche, Weber, and Isaiah Berlin would not have used different words. Actually, to be sure that the point is well-understood, Rawls historicizes the entire jurisprudential tradition. It is not the case that its incarnation in the institutions of the modern constitutional states represents the precarious, long-suffered success of rational practical thought, that is, of the men who believed well-founded axiological truths declared, let us say, in the Declaration of Independence of 1776 or the Principles of 1789. Kant was wrong when he wrote that those principles were enough to make the most pessimistic philosopher change his mind regarding the "crooked timber" of humanity. On the contrary, the same

[27] Ibid., Introduction, pp. xxi–xxii.

[28] Ibid., p. xvi.

[29] Ibid., p. xxvi.

declarations are the result of a "new social possibility," in some way already emerged from history, which gains consent not in virtue of the moral value of justice, but thanks to the more political, prudential ones of "stability" and "harmony" (or peace): "Indeed, the success of liberal constitutionalism came as a discovery of a new social possibility: the possibility of a reasonably harmonious and stable pluralist society."[30] A new possibility, in other words, altogether indifferent to the truth of the axiological claims grounding human rights. This is the reason why the form of political liberalism that is the heir of "liberal constitutionalism" now becomes aware of itself, so to speak, as a "purely" political doctrine: "Which moral judgments are true, all things considered, is not a matter for political liberalism, as it approaches all questions from within its limited point of view."[31]

Here it is hard not to agree with Richard Rorty when he attributes "an integrally historicist and anti-universalistic attitude" to Rawls, an attitude that does not provide a rational justification, but merely "a historico-political description" of the American society at the time of Rawls's writing.[32] However, this strategy of *avoiding the question of truth* has a further consequence.

To see such a consequence clearly, we accept the Rawlsian definition of "comprehensive liberalism," a moral philosophy that Rawls himself sees defined by the positive answer to three questions on the origins of moral normativity: (1) whether it is or is not accessible to simple human reason, (2) whether it originates from nature and human societies, rather than the mind of God, and (3) whether human beings are capable of acting freely for moral reasons and motivations, or only under the promise of prizes and the threat of punishment.[33]

As we have seen, the positive answer to these three questions defines a universalistic moral standpoint, one that has no foundation other than good reasons accessible to any human intelligence and sensibility, founded on the presupposition of our ultimate freedom from determinism of any

[30] Ibid., p. xxv.

[31] Ibid., p. xx.

[32] Rorty (1991, quoted in Sala 2012, p. 58).

[33] Rawls (2005 [1993], p. xxvi).

sort—natural, historical, social, economic, theological. Now, "political liberalism," Rawls writes, has nothing to do with "comprehensive liberalism." Political liberalism, he writes, "does not take a general position on these three questions, but allows for different comprehensive conceptions to answer in their different ways."[34]

The second consequence is that, from the perspective of political liberalism, even a moral philosophy as universalist as "comprehensive liberalism" is degraded to the rank of being just one ethos among others. Now, the claim that this is *not* the case, precisely because comprehensive liberalism is universally accessible to the simple reason of all, was the very germ of modern practical reason from Grotius to Kant: Rawls decisively breaks even with what was formerly the matrix of his own thinking.

We can see with great clarity that this new theory's presupposition is the *fact* of existing constitutional democracies. Actually, the horizon here seems to be the USA itself, and it is not surprising that Rawls has been, then and now, accused of "parochialism." One cannot but agree with Habermas when he objects: "Of course, all this holds only on the assumption that just institutions already exist,"[35] or when he criticizes Rawls for "not having sufficiently distinguished between the normative and the descriptive plane, between the level of principles and the level of facts."[36]

To sum up, at the heart of contemporary political theory, we find a highly sophisticated justification of that "conversion to reality" or "erosion of ideality" we identified as pervasive in today's mentality. Perhaps Rawls helps us to better focus on its multifarious nature. Agnosticism in practical philosophy is different from skepticism: and yet it has the same consequence, namely "suspending" the question of truth or the necessity of searching for it.

On the other hand, concerning the conflict of values: who decides, in a regime of "suspended truth," which positions are "decent" and which are the "rogue states"? We do not know if there is a direct connection between the forms of decency and indecency found in the texts of

[34] Sala (2012, pp. 12–13).

[35] Habermas (1996, p. 58).

[36] Sala (2012, p. 54). Roberta Sala cites the 1995 correspondence, "which put the two thinkers head to head on the theme of political liberalism," but also successive writings: Habermas (1998, Part II, chs 2 and 3, and Habermas 1996, especially Chaps. 2 and 3).

political philosophy and actual decisions made by democratic governments (especially American ones), yet the problem remains. There are excellent reasons to believe that certain positions in the public space are absolutely "indecent," so why should the *theory* of political justice abstain from taking seriously the truth of judgments declaring indecency, which are unjustifiable, and hence only offensive, in a regime of "suspended truth"?

Let us see an example. The constructivist theorist's question was: In what way do constitutional democracy's institutions need to be organized to satisfy the equitable terms of cooperation among citizens "considered free and equal"?[37] Nevertheless, now the question is: Considered by whom? Take the local demagogue who compares the face of a political adversary to that of an orang-utan. So, then, why should the equal dignity of persons be a part of the principles of a well-ordered society, given that some people contest it? Why call these principles *justice* and not simply *stability*? For instance, one might tell that demagogue: "I do not care whether you are right or wrong objectively, but it is in your *interest* to not say certain things. Otherwise, you exclude yourself from the advantages of being a member of this liberal and stable society." However, what good is this admonishment to a demagogue who, if he could, would immediately get rid of those constitutional norms? For example, he could object: "America first." He would be reasoning along with *the same* "realist" premises.

This last remark brings us back to Europe.

4 Updating Socrates: Starting from Experience

What consequences can one draw from the dramatic aspect of the "serious problem," that of the "absolute depth of that irreconcilable latent conflict" among the scales of values in a pluralistic society? Truth is "divisive." How many times have we heard this phrase, which excludes the sincere and profound confrontation between one's and others' reasons in

[37] Rawls (2005 [1993], p. xix).

the public space and cannot but exclude ethics and logic from a properly "political" discussion? What is left of politics when it has no other obligations than the prudential and the strategic? Once you think this way, you are likely to take it for granted that politics is an ambiguous, opportunistic activity, certainly not made for anyone who is not willing to "get one's hands *dirty*."

Here we see another aspect of that problem that we would describe as disheartening rather than dramatic. There is no inner life where there is no longer a search for truth. There is no inner freedom where there is no philosophy. To separate political theory from philosophy as a *search* for further axiological knowledge, to interpret the so-called "autonomy" of politics in such a strong sense, is a sophisticated but potentially ominous way of reducing the ideal to the real, of reducing value to facts, the spirit to the letter and, finally, right to might.

Let us come back to Rawls's Socrates. There are perhaps as many "Socrates" as there are philosophers, ancient and modern, but ours is Socrates as portrayed by one of the greatest and, paradoxically, least understood philosophers of the twentieth century: Edmund Husserl. We have already seen this Socrates, in Sect. 4 in Chap. 1), contrasted with the Socrates of Bernard Williams, and taken up as the Husserlian "Socraticism" in Chap. 3 (especially Sects. 2, 3, and 4). Now we can display Husserl's text in its crucial passages:

> Every action is motivated through intentions and convictions: about things, as those which refer to the environing world; but also about values, as those which refer to beauty and ugliness, good and evil, utility and disutility. Most of the time, these intentions are completely vague and lacking any evidence. [….] Socrates' method of knowledge is a method of radical clarification […]
>
> Socrates […] in response to the Sophists who denied any reasonable meaning to life, placed the fundamental opposition between vague opinion and evidence, governing all wakeful personal life, into the very focus of the ethical concern […]
>
> Plato transposed the Socratic method of justification to science.[38]

[38] Husserl (1956 [1923–1924], pp. 9–12).

This text suggests the decisive step forward that we have to take. Addressing the problem of normativity and its sources has nothing to do with ascending again to the lost sky of a "metaphysics" that used to be associated with words like "truth" and "values," a habit "prior" to the "post-metaphysical" epoch in which we find ourselves, notwithstanding the point that Habermas makes in this passage on Rawls:

> In a pluralistic society, the theory of justice can expect to be accepted by citizens only if it limits itself to a conception that is post-metaphysical in the strict sense, that is, only if it avoids taking sides in the contest of competing forms of life and worldviews.[39]

From this passage, one can infer that a "rigorously post-metaphysical" conception would imply the agnosticism of "suspended truth." Now, for Habermas (and for us), it is certainly *true* that it is not up to the state to determine which vision of the world should be the one according to which its citizens should live. Moreover, it is *true* that all that the state is expected to do is only to favor and protect free self-determination within the limits of mutual respect for others' free self-determination. However, even these well-justified beliefs, for which we await proof to the contrary, would become, in a "post-metaphysical" regime, an avowal of simple axiological agnosticism. That is to say: the state's secularism (a *value* commitment, by which the state takes on the obligation to protect the liberty of religion and the right to practice it, whatever the religion is) becomes mere tolerance or *neutrality*—or, in other words, *indifference*. To recognize the *value* of its secularism—and the relative obligations and rights—the state would go back to metaphysical dogmatism: against the very assumption of the "early" Rawls, who never presented his principles of justice as though they had fallen from the sky of metaphysics.

In conclusion, the "post-metaphysical" conception is simply the Nietzschean–Weberian–Berlinian thesis that from the *essence* of a value one derives its "irreconcilability" with other values. It is the fox's position, in other words, not the hedgehog's.

[39] Habermas (1996, p. 60).

The step ahead that our Husserlian Socrates proposes is not to oppose one principle to another—for example, the hedgehog's thesis to that of the fox—nor is it a return to the sky of the Platonic good. It is, on the contrary, the act of putting one's feet back into the lifeworld, to see how things really are in the sphere where our ideas and convictions are put to the test by *encountered* goods and evils, and where we have to face objections and enter into conflict with others' reasons.

The question is, do we always come out unscathed from these tests? Do our convictions remain altogether firm? Don't they, instead, sometimes gain depth and structure and more often insinuate doubts and the awareness of knowing less than we ought to? Are our beliefs not put to the test of experience when we are in the position of directly perceiving ills or evils of which we at first had only an abstract notion? In these confrontations, encounters, and disagreements, how many times has the content of a value been so clear to us as to show itself essentially "conflicting" with other values? Is it not more often the case that one discovers to what extent our convictions and those of others are "completely vague and lacking any evidence"?

True enough, we act, in most cases, without clarifying our opinions, leaving them "obscure" and unfounded. But surely this is not an unalterable fact. We can always look for reasons justifying our value commitments. Perhaps we have no desire for such a task: but desire (or lack of it) is no less subject to correction than any other mode of consciousness. A perception can be illusory; an emotion can be inappropriate; a decision can be inopportune or unjust; a desire can be motivated by vulgar sentiments. We have already seen (Sect. 4 in Chap. 3) that *every* lived experience, and hence every moment of our life, is subject to critical doubt about its being right or wrong. The fact is that "all life is position-taking," which does not mean "choosing sides," for "all position-taking is subject to an ought, to a verdict concerning validity or invalidity."[40] This occurs precisely because we answer in a more or less adequate way to the demands that things and people manifest in every moment of life. We would not be able to learn anything from experience if we could not take erroneous positions and correct them—thus, we can take the right positions, too.

[40] Husserl (2002 [1911]). See Chapter 3, note 3 for a contextualization of the quotation.

Now, in the passage on Socrates cited above, Husserl speaks of convictions and intentions "relative to the being" of things and "relative to values" that things embody. To both types of positions, "doxastic" (from *doxa*, opinion) and "axiological," he recognizes a claim to *validity* (which most times is taken for granted and passes unobserved: we do not typically doubt that we are seated where we are or that a book we are reading, say, is boring). Socrates, Husserl says, began to go around asking for justification for both types of claims, and this question became the center of ethics. What right have you to entertain this conviction if you have no proof that it is true? At least look for evidence. The Socratic "ethics of beliefs" extends itself to value commitments.

All the philosophical foxes that we have encountered (not to mention the wolves and the moths) would instead deny that there is any sense at all in asking for epistemic justification for the second type of validity claims—those relative to positions of value, whether positive or negative emotions or articulated judgments. Some (especially among the wolves and the moths) would deny that there is any sense in asking for justification even for the doxastic type of positions, that is, for factual beliefs (for "there are no facts, but only interpretations"). These are the full-fledged skeptics,[41] while the others are just axiological skeptics or agnostics.

These axiological skeptics are precisely those who oppose Socrates today: exactly like the Sophists, whose "school" had contested "a rational sense of life," against whom Socrates had reacted. Part of their strategy will be to offer the strange Rawlsian image of Socrates as one who can believe in moral and rational politics, precisely because no one opposes his universalism, or because there are no alternative "comprehensive conceptions," no other religions. How can they fail to notice that their politics of abstention from truth eviscerates "every rational sense of life"? Or, rather, that it views every attempt at living an "examined life" as socially and politically irrelevant?

The politics of abstention from the (search for) truth, because divisive, is motivated by the conviction that living is not taking *positions*, fallibly

[41] Today, as is well known, there are many who support a position in ontology and philosophy of mind, "eliminative materialism," according to which all our perceptions are nothing but systematic fictions, corresponding to epiphenomena without physical foundation: like green grass, the smell of coffee, or human civilization. See Varzi (2014, 2015).

and corrigibly; it is taking *sides*, fatally and conflictually. Life is not subject to the jurisdiction of reason but to the force of faith and politics. This conviction, however, is itself a position of the will rather than of the intellect: it is a *policy* of abstention. Axiological skepticism can be a *strategical* position—an avoidance of what is "divisive." It ignores the request for justification: it does not want to be called "skepticism," it prefers to be called "pessimism of reason."

5 Truth and Will: Against Arbitrariness and Rationalization

What, then, is this "pessimism of reason"? Why should we entrust the exercise of axiological and practical thought, not to sentiments—which are dispositions to evaluation nourished by meaningful experiences—but to arbitrary psychological dispositions, such as optimism or pessimism? In the previous section, I suggested that we should rather start to "examine (our) lives" in the lifeworld, the world of encounters and confrontations regarding opinions about facts and values: we have to start from there in order to revive the meaning of Socrates' discussion with that kind of skepticism that "challenges every rational sense to life."

The lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is famously the last foundational ground for phenomenological philosophy. The term "phenomenology" (as denoting a general method of philosophical research, rather than an aspect of psychology that deals with "phenomenal consciousness") has been so extensively abused throughout the second half of the last century, consequently losing any definite sense in the eyes of scientific communities, that a short reminder of the way we are using the term is in order here.

Phenomenology is an inquiry into whatever object's essential features can be presented in a direct or intuitive mode, from a first-person, idealized perspective. According to its fundamental principle of methods, no theoretical problem about a type of thing *S* should be addressed without recourse to the intuitive presence of some token or instance, *s*, of *S*. For there is no source of evidence for philosophy except in the presence of the things that philosophers investigate. Still more generally, there is no "origin" but the present, for knowledge. Even proving a mathematical

theorem is not possible unless one can "update" or bring to fresh, intuitive presence the evidence for it—in other words, "see" again the steps necessary for its conclusion.

From this point of view, Socrates' legacy is a request for justification for any "law," and, therefore, also for any "will" that brings it into being. Philosophical thought addresses the ultimate sources of normativity. When dealing with political obligation, it is not happy with the alternative between "normativism" and "realism." It does not limit itself to looking for arguments that back up the one or the other horn of the dilemma: *Rex facit legem*, or *lex facit regem*?

Of course, the "Socratic" philosopher rejects voluntarism and decisionism, as well as the claim that "the sovereign" is the source of normativity, no matter who holds sovereignty—even if it is a god. However, this first step is immediately followed by a second. That is an additional question: what can ground the norm's claim to be a good one in any of the relevant senses? Socrates' answer, in a sense, represents the baptismal mark of philosophy. The validity of the norm is founded on the recognition of an axiological *truth*. So, in the language of Plato (or at least one of his disciples capable enough to plausibly fake him): "the law wants to be a discovery of being";[42] that is, in the formula of (a form of) legal rationalism which would best be called cognitivism, *veritas facit legem*. This, as is well known, was the proposition put into question by Hobbes, theorist of the *Leviathan*: "*non veritas, sed auctoritas facit legem*."

We will not get trapped in the debate between these two types of all-encompassing visions. It has no end and perhaps no future. Political realism has never needed epistemic reasons to operate, and the practical idealist today starts fearing fundamentalism at the mere mention of the word "truth." Restoring *jus*—the Law—to the test of the *search* for truth, in the field of public ethics and politics, is the "step forward" that Socrates' legacy would prompt us to take. According to Socrates, the need for clarity and evidence, good reasons or justification for belief, is the essential ethical (and not only epistemological) requirement of the human being

[42] The citation comes from *Minos*, a brief dialogue attributed to Plato, the authenticity of which is controversial and denied by modern scholars. In particular, the similarity with Hipparchus makes one think that the text might have been written by someone other than Plato circa AD 350.

as a thinking being. Why ethical? Why should the distinction between the fundamental opposition between vague opinion and evidence be placed “into the very focus of ethical concern?” We outlined this claim first in Chap. 1 and took it up again (see Sect. 4 in Chap. 3). A further explication of its meaning is in order here, in a chapter on the relations between will and truth.

My need for clarity, evidence, and justification is certainly a constraint set on the arbitrariness of norms not established by me, be they established by a god, a king, a tradition, or a culture. But above all, it is what saves norms from the arbitrariness of my own will. It rescues normativity from the authority of any simple will *as such*, from its arbitrary character. It demands that *any* will be justifiable, starting with one’s own.

This is a thrust that Socrates already made into the nature of good and evil, and that no longer has imitators of equal stature, I believe, to this day. There is no defense from the arbitrariness of the human will (that Descartes identified with free will, “the mark of the divine worker in us”) except the force of a truth’s evidence. This concerns quite especially the will defended, favored, and coddled “regardless” by each of us: one’s own will.

Of course, a piece of evidence is such only until proven otherwise; our fallibility is certain, as much as our ability to correct our cognitive mistakes upon new evidence; finally, the power of evidence is of a completely different kind from a natural constraint, precisely because it is not a causal power but a rational duty. That is why our freedom can undoubtedly ignore it—this is the first argument of political realists against practical idealists.

A more theoretical objection to axiological cognitivism would have it that doxastic states, in contrast to conative and affective states, are not motivational: no pure knowledge as such is a sufficient reason to act. So there is in fact a gap between (knowledge of the) truth and will. This is to be granted. However, it is hardly an objection: for a (dis)value, as a *reason for action*, is never a cause, as psychological motivation is often supposed to be. A deontic obligation is no cause, or compelling motive, for action unless it is (freely) endorsed as such.

A modest phenomenological experiment, and its analysis, will conclude this section. Consider the sense of inner death, the profoundly

mortifying feeling, which we experience when truth is triumphantly injured in the light of the media. Imagine the most incredible solecisms, the most glaring logical fallacies, and even the most impudent mystifications of the facts triumphing, with no peep from a critical voice rising to defend the honor of rational thought—after all, the only specifically human thing we have. Then our whole being yearns to see an angel descend while unsheathing the shining sword of logic, this blade that gives life and light instead of death.

I have deliberately emphasized the rhetoric of it, or accentuated the phenomenological (emotional) *quality* of moments like these, known to all of us, because it is important that we reflect on its deep meaning. As Pascal noted in a thought whose depth we will never cease to consider: "why does a crippled person awaken our compassion, while a crippled thought fills us with anger?" The first half of the answer, as Pascal observes, is that walking straight does not lie within the power of a crippled person, whereas (not) distorting logic is something for which the speaker is responsible, as for rational or irrational thought. This tells us the difference between the foundations of compassion, which has in view our fellow humans' fragility and succumbing to nature's laws, and those of anger, which has in view our responsibility for the damage or wrong that others (or we ourselves) do.

But the second half of the answer must tell us why the anger, or the indignation, or the mortification we feel when the crippling of thought triumphs can be so great: this greatness must depend on the severity of the suffered wrong. The damage inflicted is incommensurable: because it takes away our last defense against ourselves, which is the evidence of the truth, contrary to our judgments. We rational animals, in fact, are also the animals that want to "be right" even at the cost of all sorts of counterfeiting and cheating. Nothing is more terrible than the blinding power of ideologies, the history of the blood that they have cost us. However, rationalization is always lurking even where no ideological matter is at stake. Evil is so closely intertwined with the good anywhere that philosophy, it seems, was born only to unravel, every day and at every moment, this omnipresent, subtle tangle.

People want to be right, and they want to convince us because and when they *believe* themselves to be right. Rhetoric, the art of persuading

other people independently of the truth of what is at stake, was invented to rule other people's will by mastering their minds. This is why it was "against" rhetoric that philosophy was born, as Socrates rises against Protagoras and Gorgias. This is also the reason why the damage done by those who cripple or disdain logic and evidence is so great: by poisoning the sources of knowledge, they undermine the last defense we have against the obstinacy of our will to be right, in good or bad faith. They deprive us of any weapon against the rationalization of our most arbitrary desires and impulses.

The philosopher's skepticism leaves us helpless before the evil that comes from within us—and whence does evil come in the last analysis, if not from within us? The defense that Socrates invented—the examined life—is the only one that survives the death of any god. Precisely for having invented or found it, Socrates was so loved and so hated, as no other "sage" before or since has been. For he gave a voice and universal discipline to the "demon" that murmured *against himself*, and in light of which he never wanted to call himself "wise," aware only of that which he did not know.

6 On the Sources of Normativity

Some words sum up the fundamental idea of a life of philosophical research and sometimes mark a new way of thinking. Two of these words not only indicate a path of moral philosophy but bring with them a renewed awareness of the ethical root of philosophical research. These two words are *justification* and *values* (in the plural form). They alone indicate the *alpha* and *omega* of phenomenological research in moral, legal, and political philosophy—not to mention theoretical philosophy and epistemology. These two words also denote two pillars of the new phenomenological idea—new, that is, compared to its Kantian version—of the "primacy of axiological reason." New, because *this* concept of axiological reason is itself new, relative to Kant's famous vindication of practical reason's primacy, and different from it.

The first word, "justification," is key to the whole of Husserl's thought and indicates the need and request voiced by critical awakening through

the question: *Why?* The second, "values," is the key to Scheler's thinking, starting from his still too-easily-ignored masterpiece on values,[43] and indicates the infinite variety of *qualities* of real things in the everyday world, characterized by two traits: polarity (positive or negative) and relative rank (lower or higher). More on that in the next chapter.

These two key notions make up the new concept of axiological reason. Looking back, we can perhaps see the broader context of the double movement (normative embodiment and withdrawal from the space of reasons) that practical reason underwent in the twentieth century. It cannot be denied that philosophy has increasingly lost prestige within the formation of the ruling classes, in Europe, and then in the rest of the world, even if it is arguable whether this loss took place to the real benefit of specific scientific knowledge. The other side of the coin is that the history of this part of the world, since the time of the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro in Athens, throughout Christianity and its reforms, is essentially marked by a tendency to replace civilizations founded on religion—be they theocratic, hierocratic, or traditional civilizations—with ones founded on reason.

A civilization "founded on reason" is one in which the rules that regulate personal and social life are, like the behaviors they regulate, subject to the scrutiny of those that ask for reasons, in which all norms are literally subject to the *jurisdiction* of our reason.

By now, we should know this much: "reason," as the disposition and willingness to doubt and to verify our positions (in the specific sense of this word explained in Sect. 4 in Chap. 2), is the *question* about right and wrong that courses through every experience and every moment of our lives. Reason, therefore, includes sensibility and feeling. Classical phenomenologists have insisted on this from the beginning of the last century. More recently, for about 20 years now, works have sprung up, left and right, that connect feeling to reason and passions to politics, for good and bad. However, the idea of "reason" as a jurisdiction *internal to any modality of consciousness*, in particular emotions and feelings, on their appropriateness or adequacy (and not as a separate "faculty")—this is an

[43] Scheler (1973). Many other phenomenological thinkers, from Edith Stein to Dietrich von Hildebrand to Herbert Spiegelberg to Nikolai Hartmann, were influenced by Scheler's text.

entirely new take on "reason," that the analytic philosophy of emotions does not seem to have made its own.[44]

A civilization founded on reason is one in which, in particular, all the norms of a national community, first, and an international and cosmopolitan community, second, are potentially subject to this request for justification on the part of anyone who wants to advance it. Therefore, a civilization founded on reason is the opposite of the totalitarian nightmare described by Plato's liberal critics. It is literally a civilization based on our questions, in the broadest sense of the term.

Husserl spoke of this tendency as the *telos* that characterizes Europe.[45] A *telos* is but a task. However, either the task of questioning is renewed every day in most citizens' lives, or it disappears, together with control over public officials from the institutions that make it possible. This is why Husserl, from the start of the 1920s, made *renewal* the fundamental category of ethics. What must renew itself every day is precisely the verification of all "positions" we take—on reality, value, and action. Is there a better antidote to the misunderstanding that makes one's relation to values a form of faith rather than an experience to be explored each and every day?

The experience of (dis)values and the burning need to bring it to clarity and articulate awareness in all its forms and its implications is the beating heart of classic phenomenology. It has been so from its very beginning, even in the presence of that bankruptcy of reason that the past century experienced with the First World War and all that followed.

The phenomenological tradition never became proper nourishment for the hunger for clarity of young people who went into intellectual, cultural, legal, administrative, and political professions in the last century. Despite appearances to the contrary, this is the case, even for the only classical phenomenologist who continues to be widely read, Edmund Husserl. His quest for the foundations of meaning, order, value, and coherence within ordinary experience made the sometime logician and experimental psychologist that he was into the innovator of the very idea

[44] De Monticelli (2020a, b).

[45] Husserl (1989 [1923], *passim*).

of reason and, in particular, of practical reason, and into the inventor of the concept of *sensitive reason*.[46]

Husserl had a bitter fate despite his global posthumous fame: his life has been dissected into a somewhat inconsistent intellectual biography, full of "turns" and changes of focus, one that ended up hiding the powerful, unitary structures of his admittedly endless research on the sources of normativity. His questioning spanned every kind of norm, from the logical and linguistic to the ethical, legal, aesthetic, and technical, to the buried universe of implicit norms that regulate human modes of being in the world and the everyday normalcy of life, to the normative and axiological structures distinguishing cultures.

He died in 1938, some months before Kristallnacht, while that death that "is a German master"—according to the desperate refrain of Paul Celan's *Todesfuge*—was already raging. Husserl died deprived of his right to teach, thanks also to one of his former students who had become a Nazi. This is the epilogue. What about the prologue?

One cannot understand the greatness and the breath of phenomenology if one does not start from another fact, which is as neglected as the utter incompatibility of Husserl's and Heidegger's ways of thinking. At the heart of Husserl's first successful work, the *Logical Investigations*, particularly of the first volume, *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, we do not "simply" find a question about the status of the "laws of logic." We find, rather, a question about the status of all norms for action whatsoever, in the most general sense in which we oppose the "normative" to the "descriptive" and norms and values to facts.[47] Speaking, quite particularly, *is* acting, and any speech act is subject to constraints given by syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic norms, whose violations destroy the sense of the act, its purpose, and its value. Logic itself is only the paradigm of a "theoretical" discipline founding a "normative" one: the theory of truth as a foundation for the theory of valid inference. Its "parallelism" with axiology and ethics, the pillars of practical reason, is thoroughly argued for by Husserl (1988, 2001).

[46] Even in the exercise of our five sense we take positions, we doubt, we correct. We are animals subject to the jurisdiction of uncertainty and reason from the moment we open our eyes and ears.

[47] Husserl (2001), Chapter II, *Theoretical Disciplines Grounding Normative Ones*, §§ 13–16.

In fact, the first doubt that had struck the young Husserl was not logical or epistemological but ethical and legal. In a note from a course on ethics and legal philosophy held in Halle in 1897, three years before the publication of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl focuses on Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, which was "famous all over the world!" as Husserl noted with exclamatory emphasis. The author of Zarathustra had not yet died; only eight years earlier, he had nobly welcomed madness by embracing the now-famous Turin horse that was being cruelly whipped—and then plummeted into darkness. Husserl commented: "scepsis has penetrated ethics down to its deepest roots." As I noticed elsewhere, what is surprising is not so much the anti-skeptical theme, which is part of the very foundations of phenomenology, as the fact that Husserl had made his debut in teaching a course that concerned *practical even before theoretical thought*, and examined the foundations of ethical and juridical normativity.[48]

Husserl somehow rediscovers the ancient, Socratic question: Where do the laws come from? Do they come from God, nature, human convention, or reason?

If we have dwelled on the founder of phenomenology for so long, it is only to show the breadth of the views that phenomenological thought has expressed, a breadth that perhaps only the extreme depth of the knowledge of evil reserved for its first generations had made possible. Reliving to this depth the great Socratic disputes (Socrates–Thrasimachus, Socrates–Gorgias, Socrates–Euthyphro), phenomenologists saw how the "task" of philosophy was absolved in the ancient world—but only by half. The ancients' indisputable legacy was logic: not in the sense, simply, of a theory of valid reasoning, but in the sense of an "eidetic theory of truth," that is, of a theory of those syntactic, semantic, pragmatic bonds, the violation of which destroys the possibility that our words express truth or

[48] I reported this text in De Monticelli (2022). The passage on Nietzsche goes on: "Is there really […] an absolute position on 'right' and 'morality'? Do not the supposedly sacrosanct ethical laws rest on blind prejudice, on arbitrary imposition on the part of religious or state authorities? Do not the enormous differences between the moral intuitions of diverse peoples and times which history and anthropology increasingly spread before our eyes demonstrate that universally valid and unconditionally obligatory ethical prescriptions do not exist and that they all have only a relative value?" "Ethik und Rechtsphilosophie. Ergänzende Texte (1897)," in Husserl (1988, HUA 28, pp. 382–383, my translation).

falsity. The *idea of truth*—which logic in this broad sense defines as a gift of bonds invariant through all possible languages—was the first *eidos* that philosophy brought to light. It was, still better, the first of the *ideals*, and the first *datum* against which the skeptic stumbles by stating that there is no truth: that is, coming to affirm at least this one truth, in contradiction with him or herself.

Modernity, on the other hand, did not find the way to solve the other half of the task: the refutation of practical skepticism, the eidetic theory of the good. This is the desideratum of Husserl's thought, which sees its first grand sketch in Max Scheler's work, followed by Nicolai Hartmann and many others: that is, the theory of values and their knowledge, which is still our task to this day.

7 Europe, the Homeland that Renounces Its Roots

What drops a veil over our eyes as scholars, thus hiding the essentials of what a philosopher wants to communicate to us, despite the attention and gratitude that we bring to him? In 1961, Enzo Paci published the Italian translation of Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences*. He wrote a rich, lively introduction: but not a word on the circumstances in which Husserl had written, in 1936–1937, the last message in a bottle to European humanity in the renewed betrayal of its clerics. Not a word about the sense of that Husserlian phrase describing the philosopher as a "functionary of humanity," written by a man deprived of his public teaching function (due to anti-Semitic laws). By then, Husserl had seen the notions he had for a lifetime identified as the very pillars of the "Idea of Europe" so openly and violently denied by most of his colleagues in the wave of conversions to the prevailing reality that had overcome the vast majority of German intellectuals. Much less about the violence Husserl underwent when writing the *Crisis* can be found in the Preface that the Heideggerian philosopher Gérard Granel wrote for his French translation.[49] Granel was among the most zealous defenders of Heidegger on the

[49] Husserl (1976 [1954]).

occasion of the debates prompted by Victor Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism* in the 1980s.[50]

It is that very "idea" of Europe, worked out by Husserl in the 1920s and 1930s, that guided us through this long excursus across the avenues of twentieth-century axiological skepticism.

According to this idea, Europe, more than being a continent, is an ever-resurgent surplus of the ideal over the real: right over might, value over fact, and search over dogma.

A *possible* surplus, though, is never necessary and is even perennially at risk, since it lives only through the commitment of those whom Husserl called the functionaries of humanity[51] (Altiero Spinelli in his autobiography calls them "the builders"[52]). Such is the meaning of the great eulogy of "that much-abused Age of Enlightenment" at the beginning of the *Crisis*, as if Husserl had succeeded in gathering all the reasons of his life in those first seven paragraphs, including a moving reminiscence of Beethoven–Schiller's *Ode to Joy* as the "undying testimony" to the spirit of that "so admirable" age.[53] Here, the Enlightenment is understood as one of the ages of the unfolding humanism of practical reason and, at the same time, as an ever-renewed task for "Europe": a country where, in a sense, science and democracy do not cease to be, again and again, reinvented (or put at risk), from the very moment in which the issue of the justification of all positions one takes was raised to a veritable style of life, but also challenged and so often put down. Of course, this style of life is a very demanding ideal for our fragility to support. As Jeanne Hersch used to say, the fragility of democracy is the same as that of individuals.

In this vein, Husserl could write that "merely fact-minded sciences create merely fact-minded men." He referred to the men who had forced him to silence and never put in question their adhesion to the winner's chariot. But the link between fact-minded sciences and fact-minded men reminds us of Husserl's still valid criticism of both the mind's "naturalization" and historicist relativism, as equally implying skepticism about

[50] Farias (1989 [1987]).

[51] Husserl (1970 [1954]), *Crisis*, §7, p. 17. Translation slightly modified.

[52] Spinelli (1987), I, 7.

[53] Husserl (1970 [1954]), *Crisis*, §3, p. 10.

ideas and ideals. To be a "merely fact-minded man" is to close one's ears to the question "why?"—the question that calls for the verification of the validity of one's position and crosses each state of consciousness. In this sense, the professional skeptic is one who ultimately gives up the exercise of reason: and his destiny is likely to be cynicism.

Husserl's is a Socraticism retraced through a deep, constructive, but critical reflection on the best legacy of modernity: Kantian practical philosophy. The phenomenologist's first move is to claim as an inheritance from Kant the purity and distinction that moral reasons have over all other motives for action, that which makes moral reasons "unconditional" (and usually "divisive"), differentiating them from any strategic, prudential, "political," instrumental, ideological, or utilitarian reason.

Thus, the Kantian autonomy of moral motivation is saved. However, this same autonomy is rescued from the autocracy of the will and founded in a sort of cognition that is—let us repeat—always to be verified by examining the experiences, the values at stake, and their relations. We cannot "give ourselves a law" except when we recognize axiological truth, and we cannot recognize an axiological truth except by acknowledging that our knowledge of such truth is always limited and partial, never exhausting the boundless resources of axiological data, yet to be discovered in the envisaged facts.

This second move taking us beyond Kant is the epistemology of values. Any value commitment ought to be fulfilled with intuitive evidence of its rightness. This is specific of a phenomenological theory of moral knowledge (and axiological knowledge more generally). It opens up the eyes of *feeling*, obliging the *will* through discernment and discretion, the "passion for seeing distinctions" through "touch," "taste," "nose," "ears,"—and all the nuances of affective sensibility. One may wonder why, from time to time, we have recognized a cognitive competence or an *esprit de finesse* to our sensitivity, but almost always only for the *aesthetic* sphere of value experience. Recall what we found on the two opposed theories on the nature of axiological dissent, depending on the adoption of a voluntarist or a cognitivist theory of value commitments (see above, Chap. 4, Sect. 4). By highlighting the cognitive, experiential aspect of value commitment, phenomenology changes our reading of human *discord*. It enables us to read disagreements of the heart (*cordis*) into the word

"discord" and move beyond just a clash of conflicting *wills*. Now, the heart or sensibility is a *capacity for experience* (feeling), both for illusion or error and correction. Experience and critical reflection can liberate the will from a passive commitment to identitarian, or even just ideological, values and encourage its freedom *or autonomy*. Phenomenological axiology makes us free to learn from experience and fosters moral autonomy by opposing sheer conformity to socially and politically enforced rules.

A crucial point in the theory of axiological experience calls for a supplementary analysis of the "will" that is so central to all the moral philosophies we have gone through, but for which we never quite found an articulated theory. In a sense, Kant's distinction between a "pure" will (determined by "pure reason") and an "empirically affected" will (determined by non-moral motivations) is correct, as we have just seen. Moral reasons are categorically distinct from non-moral ones (although it is difficult to maintain an awareness of the distinction, and herein lies Kant's conception of radical evil, the "impurity" of the will).

However, what is a moral reason? Can one even conceive of a decision, even a moral one, without *evaluation*? Would such a thing be more than a sound without pitch, a color without extension? And, what kind of judgment is an evaluation? From what type of experience does it draw its evidence?

Phenomenological axiology teaches us to open the eyes of affective sensitivity whenever we desire or will. That an idea is "dear" to us does not at all mean that we should not put it to the test, and the fact that one adheres to a conviction "wholeheartedly" does not entail that one must adhere to it blindly.

Here, indeed, Husserl finds a counterpart to Socrates in the other side of Europe's soul, Christianity. This is a step so profound and faithful to the evangelical spirit that it is worth citing it directly in Husserl's own words:

> And, in general, the sense of the new religion [Christianity], in virtue of which it represented a new religious type, was that it wanted to be a religion founded not on the irrational tradition, but on the (in a sense "rational") sources of the original religious experience. In fact, even those who were born and raised in the religion had to earn their personal rela-

> tionship with Christ and, through Christ, with God, based on their original religious experience: producing, in effect, a religious intuition through the delivered evangelic messages [...] they had to intimately take a free position, feeling unified with God and trying to find access to the realm of God, following the intuited norm in Christian life.[54]

Recall Jeanne Hersch's lesson on the "archaic" origin of the need for the Absolute, its potentially idolatrous/ideological degeneration, and the anti-ideological potential of authentic spiritual life (Sect. 5 in Chap. 4). A phenomenologist would accept this lesson and its advice for international politics, according to which reason is no alternative to the world's religions, and, above all, it must not humiliate them to impose itself. The ways of universal reason made up of our imperfect and fallible, but always falsifiable and corrigible, intuitions and reasons may well be disclosed to the believer of any religion, as they were in the end disclosed to secularized Christians. The universality of reason also defines the modesty of its tasks: the salvation of the soul is something else, and the spiritual life flourishes, like the rose of Silesius, "without why"—it blooms to flourish. Preserving the divine space (however understood) as an "empty" space, free from the hands of power, is among the modest tasks of public reason in a secular state. This guardianship achieves a genuinely universal value, namely the freedom for any non-universalizable faith to flourish in its singularity. After all, transcendence is the *raison d'être* of any religion: but there is hardly a religion that would fail to recognize that no mind, no will, and no human law can "possess" divine transcendence.

In any case, here is a claim from the phenomenology of religion that belongs by right to phenomenological axiology: there can certainly be "blind faiths," but certainly it is not *in the essence* of faith, even religious faith, to be blind, as the spiritual experience of all ages proves.[55]

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[54] Husserl (1989 [1923], p. 66, my translation). In a way, the idea "Europe or philosophy" encompasses Novalis's idea of "Europe or Christianity": although in a way that couldn't possibly be less romantic, and more enlightened. This amazing passage from Husserl on Christ anticipates the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

[55] This is a subject we cannot get into here. Phenomenology of religion is indeed a material axiological discipline that has its foundations in Max Scheler's "Problems of Religion," in 1960 [1921].

Through this deepening of the Kantian principle of autonomy, one is invited to take responsibility for one's life, not only by being prepared to answer for it to the others, but also by making it a life of *cognitive research* about what matters. To this first principle of an ethical "personalism" a second is added, which makes explicit the value priority of life and the moral identity and personal flourishing of each individual over the nation's interest, the people, or any other community of belonging. Personalism and universalism are intimately related. They entail a firm assent to the "European" spirit as a supranational principle of democracy. Somehow, the "functionary of humanity" *did* find his way to the European Republic offices—but only after the war, as we saw in Sect. 2 of this chapter.

8 Martin Heidegger and the Issue of the *Black Notebooks*

The publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (since 2014) has brought the controversy of Heidegger's Nazism roaring back, leading to a global debate about the quality of Heidegger's thought.[56] As a matter of fact, the controversy had started even before, following the publication in 2006, and the translation into English in 2009, of the by-now world-wide read book by Emmanuel Faye on the "Unpublished Seminars" of 1933–1935, that provided historical proof of Heidegger's deep involvement in the ideological world of National Socialism, even more consistent and massive than those put forward by Victor Farias in the 1980s.[57]

[56] Heidegger's Notebooks 1930–1970 (*Schwarze Hefte*) appear as Volumes 94 through 97 of Heidegger's complete works or *Gesamtausgabe* (GA), according to a schedule laid out by the philosopher himself before his death in 1976 (more volumes are upcoming). Cf. Trawny 2014, 2015, 2016, GA 94–97. English available translations: 2016, 2017, 2017b. They revealed "what some say is an unmistakable smoking gun: overtly anti-Semitic statements, written in Heidegger's own hand, in the context of his philosophical thinking" (Schuessler 2014). Among the collections of essays composed on occasion of the numerous debates on Heidegger's Nazism and anti-Semitism, see Farin and Malpas (2016); Lapidot and Brumlik (2017); Mitchell and Trawny (2017); Fried (2020).

[57] Farias (1989 [1987]); Faye (2009, 2016). The argument I am going to develop supports entirely the concluding remark by Faye: "An author who, in both his writings and his deeds, has destroyed all morality, impugned the faculties of understanding and reason, destroyed metaphysics by confusing it with 'nihilism,' and related the 'truth of being' to a racist principle cannot appropriately be

A discussion of this case is in order here: the end of this chapter is devoted to the relationship between will and truth, for many reasons. First, Heidegger is our paradigm of that subclass in the Dworkinian–Berlinian fauna of axiological skepticism that represents axiological nihilism, and that—in order to underline the decisionist brand of it that Heidegger shares with Carl Schmitt—I had distinguished from the liberal foxes by the label "illiberal wolves." Second, and more importantly, Heidegger is the most violent critic of modernity and the Enlightenment both on the front of practical and of theoretical reason, that is, respectively, democracy and science; and his work keeps being a source of a persisting and popular bad press afflicting the Enlightenment and its values. Now, I devoted the two previous sections of this chapter to unveil, deep down in the grounding notions of Husserl's phenomenology, the sources of a theory of practical and theoretical reason (and of their essential link) that I presented as an updated Enlightenment, and one up to the challenges of contemporary democracy (and contemporary science). So, it is time to allow a more direct appraisal of the deep hostility reserved by Heidegger to his former teacher—and of the poor understanding that most Heideggerians had of classic phenomenology, notwithstanding their appropriation of this beautiful name. For, on the one hand, Heidegger is much more explicit on the reasons of his hostility in the *Black Notebooks* than in any other known text; on the other hand, a look at these texts may shed light on the reasons for maintaining the utter incompatibility between Heideggerianism—even in its later developments, hermeneutic, postmodern, "light" (in the way of the dancing moths), and phenomenological research.

called a 'philosopher' (Faye 2009, p. 321). Jeanne Hersch, based on personal knowledge as a student of Heidegger, came to an even more severe judgment: "Because of the violent contempt he harbored for contemporary civilization in general, and for democracy and the Weimar Republic in particular; because of the deep anchor points that the Hitler movement, with its nationalism, irrationalism, its charismatic and apocalyptic nature, found in his thought, Heidegger saw in it a momentous event, an unmissable chance, for such a deep philosopher as he was, to play a decisive role in the future orientation of history and civilization" (Hersch 1988, p. 477). I quote this passage to show how arbitrary the will can be, when not supported by a passion for truth, in its full exercise. And, indeed, this is also the conclusion reached by Jeanne Hersch: "He does not love the truth. He is indeed looking for something, and something deep—but it is not the truth" (ibid., p. 479).

That said, having a quick idea of what this discussion will be about can help. It will not be on Heidegger's Nazism, not even on his anti-Semitism: not only because they are by now ascertained facts. After all, the vast majority of those thinkers that either ignored or underestimated the degree of involvement of Heidegger in Nazi ideology never shared those political or racial commitments. Not to speak of the generation of Jean Beaufret and Jean-Paul Sartre and the other French philosophers who, immediately after the war, rescued the whole of Heidegger's thought from the "opprobrium" that he had "brought upon himself,"[58] and brought to his work a world-wide readership, by decisively contributing to set out the canon of "continental" philosophy. After all, one has to admit that most twentieth-century Heideggerians

> are scholars and teachers who instinctively recoil at the horrendous implications [of some by now much-discussed passages in the *Black Notebooks* and the *Seminars*] and who tend to find inspiration in what they take to be the later Heidegger's critique of the will and voluntarism, of hubristic modernity, and of totalizing thinking of any kind.[59]

So, I think that a new chapter of this controversy should be opened, focusing precisely on the methodological presuppositions of this "critique of modernity," which, indeed, is the common ground of both the main pillars keeping afoot the canon of "continental" philosophy, the second pillar being the post-Hegelian tradition that merged with Heidegger's

[58] Fried (2020, p. xix).

[59] Fried (2020, p. 14). The long, passionate, lucid *Letter to Emmanuel Faye* by Gregory Fried (ch. 1 of Fried 2020) is by far the most enlightening and morally terse of the responses to the "devastating book" of Emmanuel Faye by a Heidegger scholar (at least among those I could read). I completely agree with him that what is at stake in this "tremendous controversy" "goes to the heart of philosophy itself," although I disagree with some of the reasons he puts forward to keep taking Heidegger's thought seriously as a *philosophical* enterprise. On the other hand, Fried's reading of that thought from the perspective of Heidegger's concept of *Polemos* (Fried 2000) opens up a path to an understanding of Heidegger's *hostility* to Universalism, Humanism, Platonism (but also of "his will to the destruction of logical thought, his perverted usage of philosophical language, his explicit rejection of contemporary philosophy as if it had come to an end with Hegel and Nietzsche", p. 37): a path most interesting for us, since it would find a source of all this "language of struggle" in a radicalization of a non-cognitivist and indeed "tragic" theory of values (a very Nietzschean theory) of a kind of which we have met as a less radical version in Berlin's theory of conflicts (see Sect. 4 in Chap. 4).

legacy in the (paradoxical) making of the "critical thought" still inhabiting the mind of most "Rive Gauche" intellectuals.

In this section and the next, I shall, first, try to highlight these methodological presuppositions, by showing how Heidegger breaks what I called the "inner" or "eidetic" link defining philosophy: the essential link between logic and ethics, thereby arbitrarily "destroying" that commitment to the bonds of reason that Husserl had put "in the focus of the ethical concern." On this basis, it will be easier to see that Heidegger's thought qualifies as sophistry rather than philosophy. However, if such is the case, by the same standard, the critique of modernity that so many Heideggerians eagerly inherited undergoes the same verdict.

The passages in question concern the "self-annihilation" that Heidegger imputes to the Jews when referring, before and after the end of the war, to their extermination. They are extensively quoted and commented by the editor of the German version of the *Black Notebooks* and those of the editions in other languages.[60] Here are two of the relevant passages. The first one was written before, the second after the end of, the war.

> The highest type and highest act of politics: maneuvering the opponent into a position whereby he is compelled to proceed to his own self-annihilation.[61]
>
> When what is "Jewish" in the metaphysical sense combats what is Jewish, the high point of self-annihilation in history has been attained—supposing that the "Jewish" has everywhere completely seized mastery, so that even the fight against "the Jewish," and it above all, becomes subject to it.[62]

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[60] "The Shoah was an act of self-destruction by the Jews. This is the view that emerges from the new volume of Heidegger's Black Notebooks, edited by Peter Trawny […] (Gesamtausgabe 97, Anmerkungen I–V). The 560 pages of new material date from the crucial 1942–1948 period and contain the notebook for 1945–1946, which was thought to have been lost but was in fact located last spring" (Di Cesare 2015). Cf. the analogous report by Peter Trawny, "The Universal Annihilation: Heidegger's being-Historical Anti-Semitism," ch. 1 of Mitchell and Trawny (2017).

[61] Heidegger 1939–1941, English translation by Richard Rojcewicz (2017b), p. 206. ("*Die höchste Art und der höchste Akt der Politik besteht dahin, der Gegner in eine Lage hineinzuspielen, in der er dazu gezwungen ist, zu seiner eigenen Selbstvernichtung zu Schreiten*" (GA 96, p. 260)).

[62] Heidegger 1942–1948, GA 97, *Anmerkungen* I–IV). Ed. Peter Trawny, p. 20 ("*Wenn erst das wesenhaft »Jüdische« im metaphysischen Sinne gegen das Jüdische kämpft, ist der Höhepunkt der Selbstvernichtung in der Geschichte erreicht; gesetzt, daß das »Jüdische« überall die Herrschaft vollständig an sich gerissen hat, so daß auch die Bekämpfung »des Jüdischen« und sie zuvörderst in die Botmäßigkeit zu ihm gelangt.* " English Translation by Richard Polt, who put together a set of trans-

What is the line of defense of the Heideggerian party in the "tremendous controversy" unchained by discovering this intellectually primitive and morally revolting claim? Drawing on Trawny and Di Cesare (the German and the Italian editors), one can easily make the following sense of their argument about Heidegger's "metaphysical" anti-Semitism: it is, in fact, "modernity" that is self-destructive, and according to Heidegger, the Jews self-annihilated in so far as they are "the agents of modernity."[63]

This switch from the Jews to modernity is precisely the one Heidegger made to fill the logical gap between the claim registered in the *Black Notebooks* before 1945 and the German mission's disappearance from the notes inserted after, when "the war of Being against being" had been lost.[64] Since then, it is rather "the fate of the West" that is accomplished. "Being" that was "at war" against "being" disappears again from the battles of this world. Let us neglect this detail and grant that the essential point in Heidegger's "metaphysical" anti-Semitism is that the Jews are "the agents of modernity."

So, let me first sketch out my argument against the methodological basis of this "critique":

1. Heidegger asserts that the Jews self-annihilated, in so far as they are "the agents of modernity" (hence of "machination," comprising calculating thought, technology, science, industrial capitalism, etc.).

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lations of the passages on the Jews in GA 94–97, and made it public several years ago. I thank him and Gregory Fried, co-editors of the New Heidegger Research book series (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield) for their kind permission to use this translation. A complete English translation of GA 97 is still in progress by Adam Knowles.

[63] "Rigorous and consistent as ever, Heidegger does little more than draw the conclusion of what he said earlier. The Jews are the agents of modernity: they have spread evil […] they are accomplices of Metaphysics, they have brought the acceleration of technology everywhere. The accusation could not be more serious." Di Cesare (2015). An almost identical claim is to be found in Trawny (2017).

[64] In 1949, in fact, Heidegger, who had previously gone so far as to praise the "motorized attack" on France—or, shall we say, the metaphysical momentum of a new humanity capable of promoting its race thanks to technology—suddenly changes his mind on a possible palingenetic use of technology, and compares mechanized industrial agriculture to the industrial manufacture of corpses in concentration camps. Faye 2009 quotes the German edition of the Complete Works (GA 79, p. 27), where the comparison between mechanized agriculture and the manufacture of death in the gas chambers appears in the text of one of the four *Bremer Vortraege*, held in 1949 with the title *Das Ge-stell* (Faye 2009, see the whole of section 9.12).

2. Many neo-Heideggerians entirely agree with the critique of modernity (and of the Enlightenment) underlying this statement. Modernity as such ("machination" etc.) is self-annihilating. This is their way "to think with Heidegger against Heidegger" (Trawny 2017).
3. But, independently of the part of Heidegger's claim concerning "the Jews," the very core of the allegation against modernity is (in my view) not only desperately vague, not only entirely unjustified in its specific charges, but an authentic attack on (Socratic and Husserlian) philosophy, a "destruction" of it.

To see the evidence for (3) we have to get into the workshop of some Heideggerian concepts, as they emerge from the darkness of Heidegger's understanding of Husserl's thought.

9 The Jewish Uprooter and Heidegger's Three Key Concepts

> The question of *world-Judaism* [*Weltjudentum*] is not racial [*rassisch*], but rather metaphysical [*metaphysisch*], a question that concerns the kind of humanity that in an utterly unrestrained way can undertake as a world-historical task *the uprooting of every being from Being*.[65]

This is what we read on the last page of the *Black Notebooks* entitled "Ponderings XIV," in the aftermath of the German offensive announced by Hitler on June 22, 1941. The phrase I put in italics denotes the first key concept of Heidegger's thought, couched in his usual jargon. We want to pay special attention to other key phrases of Heideggerese that we shall extract from these quotations, after "the uprooting of every being from Being."

To this end, let us take a good example of a Jewish "uprooter": Edmund Husserl. The following remark comes from a text, written by Husserl almost 20 years earlier, about well-founded judgments, even those of simple experience, that become universally accessible:

[65] Heidegger (1939–1941 [2017b], p. 191).

> in the sense that what I see, anyone can see; beyond all differences between individuals, nations, traditions, whatever they are, vigorously and profoundly rooted, there are commonalities, which are the article of a common world of things, which is constituted by interchangeable experiences, such that everyone can understand and be understood by everyone else, can refer to the same seen things. And first referring to these and then proceeding beyond them opens a realm of truth, which anyone can bring to one's own sight, which anyone can see as realized within oneself, *no matter what cultural circle one is from, friend or enemy, Greek or barbarian, son of the tribe of God or God of enemy tribes.*[66]

Here is the wandering, uprooting Jew at work, whether or not Heidegger was thinking of this particular text (there is considerable evidence that he did, though). Let us now translate Husserl's plain words into Heideggerian language. Here the comments on Heidegger's text provided by Di Cesare, who very accurately quotes relevant passages from the *Black Notebooks*, are very helpful in showing how the latter's language perfectly matches the key concepts of Heidegger's most popular other writings.[67]

The Husserlian passage I quoted undoubtedly describes the "objectivity" of given and universally accessible "beings," ordinary objects. Here, then, the supposed sin of forgetting "Being" (*Sein*), the praise of evidence, "the dominance of being (*das Seiende*) that closes access to Being," reducing it to "mere presence," "wasted in a number of concepts void of roots," as Di Cesare explains[68] are on flagrant display.

The reduction of "Being" to "being," or the oblivion of Being, is the second Heideggerian key concept. Here, however, there is something else that must not be missed. Let us go back to Husserl: he insists on the

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[66] Husserl (1989 [1923], p. 77, my translation, emphasis added).

[67] This is not surprising, several other authors having provided overwhelming evidence of the parallelisms between "*Bodenlosigkheit*" (lack of ground) and "*Weltlosigkeit*"(lack of world), as key concepts describing the uprooted being of modernity in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1927) or the infra-human, animal condition in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1929–1930, English translation 1995), and the later variations of the *Black Notebooks*, where these same features are referred to the Jews. Cf. the collection of essays on *Heidegger, Ground, Race, and Community*, with contributions by Johannes Fritsche, Jaehoon Lee, Sidonie Kellerer, Robert Norton, Gaëtan Pégny, François Rastier, and Julio Quesada, edited by Faye 2014.

[68] Di Cesare (2018 [2014], p. 79). All the passages commented here are from the "Ponderings II–VI" (*Black Notebooks*, 31–38), pp. 87, 218, 480 in the German edition quoted by Di Cesare.

irrelevance of traditions, not so much concerning the universal evidence of factual judgments, but also, and above all, concerning the search after evidence for value judgments: for it happens that

> motivations derived from experience and in general from the evidence of the thing are mixed with motivations of lesser value, with those that are so deeply rooted in one's personality that their mere questioning threatens to "uproot" the personality itself, which believes that it cannot give them up without renouncing itself—things that can lead to violent reactions in one's soul.[69]

Clearly, Husserl is talking here not only of "ontic" but also axiological states of affairs: in short, of any cognitive research, including moral, legal, and political research: he is introducing a variation on the theme of *sapere aude*, with a new and painful awareness of how difficult it is to come of age, switching from the community's "cherished" certainties to the autonomy of adult thought, when one discovers the "lesser value" of the motivations to which one adheres wholeheartedly, but which stop appearing the right ones when the love for truth prevails on the will of being faithful to traditions and ethos.

Here is how Husserl reaffirms the concept of uprooting:

> A thought is not right because I or we, as we are, cannot fail to think in this way; if anything, only if a thought is right can our thinking be right and we ourselves be right.[70]

Therefore, he insists, ruthlessly:

> And it does not matter whether me or my companions like it; it does not matter whether it affects us all "at the root": there is no need of a root.[71]

Now that we know what the "evil essence" of the "uprooting" wandering Jew consists of (namely: critical thinking, the examined life), we can

[69] Husserl (1989 [1923], 77, my translation, emphasis added).

[70] Husserl (1989 [1923], p. 78, my translation).

[71] Husserl (1989 [1923], p. 78, my translation, emphasis added).

extract the third key phrase of Heidegger's language from a further passage of the *Black Notebooks*:

> My "attack" on Husserl is not directed to him alone and is not at all directed unsubstantially—the attack is directed against the neglect of the question of Being, i.e., against the essence of metaphysics as such, the metaphysics on whose ground *the machination of being* can determine history.[72]

So, Heidegger *was* indeed thinking of Husserl's philosophy when introducing his "metaphysical" and not "racial" question of "world-Judaism." Here the sense of "metaphysical" gets more precise, as Di Cesare rightly remarks: "The *Machenschaft*, the *Wesen*, the essence of metaphysics," she reminds us, is "the machination that attempts to determine the course of history by imposing the predominance of being and concealing Being."[73]

This concept of *machination*, that we found broadly used by post-Heideggerian "critical thinkers," where it loses its anti-Semitic connotations (see Sect. 1 in Chap. 5) is, of all the three key concepts, the most ambiguous. For it gives an expression to our deep, virtually paranoiac, instinct of imagining a "machinating" power responsible for everything. The more generically this power is described, the more relieved we are—we friends of Being, philosophers who contemplate nihilism, the Fate of the West or technique, capitalism or finance, all the faces of "Metaphysics" in the Heideggerian sense—and we might as well add neoliberalism to boot.

This time, however, the shepherd of Being did not remain calm and went to his appointment with the Fate of the West (or rather, with "the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism," ready for the "meeting between planetary technology and the modern man" as Heidegger had written in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* in 1935 and 1952[74]), arm in arm with Hitler, against the Enemy.

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[72] Heidegger 1939–1941. GA 96, English Translation (2017b), p. 37, cited in Di Cesare 2018 [2014], p. 121. Emphasis added.

[73] Di Cesare (2018 [2014], p. 122).

[74] Heidegger (1935, quoted from the English translation 2014, p. 152). The quotation is also reported in Fried (2020, p. 9).

As Di Cesare explains:

> In the *Black Notebooks*, while the warning about the oblivion of Being remained, the ontological difference between Being and beings became sharper; it became an extreme dichotomy, a fatal divarication, an incurable contrast. Heidegger viewed the Second World War through the schema of this ontological difference; thus, the war was revealed as the war of Being against beings.[75]

What can we derive from this piece of "metaphysical" epic? There seems to be no doubt: the three key concepts, taken together, give us the essentials of Heidegger's thought. Or at least, so we can argue, following a line of exegesis which is more and more represented among philosophers and historians (Hersch 1988; Klibansky 1991; Faye 2009; Kolnai 2013; Kellerer 2016; Faye 2016; Caminada 2016). The traits attributed to "world Jewry" in the *Black Notebooks*—the uprooting, the lack of foundation, the instrumental attitude towards everything, the calculating reason—were already familiar to Heidegger's readers from his celebrated analyses of the process of the oblivion of Being in favor of beings, or the objectification of everything through technology and science, and the machination through which modernity unfolds (by the hands of international capitalism).

Let us conclude. The three key concepts that are the three charges against modernity and its "metaphysical" activities (uprooting, forgetting Being, machinating) gain some less obscure content once referred to the very paradigm of the "Jewish uprooter"—the dear master, Edmund Husserl. But then the ultimate target of a Heideggerian critique of modernity turns out to be Husserlian philosophy as the purest heir of a Socratic, humanistic, enlightened legacy, promoting the "jurisdiction of reason" on human life. If, at least, we identify a Socratic "examined life" with the Husserlian "method of radical clarification" as a response to a deep concern "governing all wakeful personal life" and induced by the obscurity of our beliefs and opinions, or their lack of evidence. In short, the target of Heidegger's obsession seems to be philosophy as the ethical form of life:

[75] Di Cesare (2018, p. 78).

that of a life committed to the obligation to justify the validity claim that any doxastic or conative state brings with itself. This habit of life, let us admit, can be terribly "uprooting" for those who practice it: and it definitely can inhibit some sorts of "essential decisions."[76] It can lead them to give up the dear value commitments that make up their cultural or communitarian identity.

Then, even independently of the political color that Heidegger's thought has taken, what seems to be its living spirit is a sort of contempt and a movement of rejection of the "jurisdiction of reason." This rejection seems to be *the origin*, not the consequence, of his commitment to Nazism. No doubt, Heidegger does not manifest any moral worry face to Nazism and anti-Semitism; but his way of being unconcerned is not at all a first-order moral vice or fault of moral awareness. It is a second-order rejection of any commitment to epistemic and educational values, that is, to a philosopher's deontological values. It is a "destruction" of philosophy.

This conclusion allows for a further step concerning Heidegger's legacy. When browsing the contributions of the Heideggerian participants to the controversy, one comes across a move that most of them share. Concerning the Holocaust, philosophy itself would be called directly into question. Di Cesare explains this perplexing claim as follows:

> For the Holocaust is not just a historical question, but a philosophical question that directly involves philosophy. The responsibilities of a long tradition of thought must still be ascertained and discussed.[77]

This is somewhat disconcerting at first, given how the Nazis dealt with noncompliant philosophers. But upon reflection, it is not surprising that philosophy should be charged with the responsibility of the Holocaust as well, since (if our analysis is correct) it was already guilty of so much uprooting, objectifying, and machination. After all, this claim had already

[76] "But the temporary increase in the power of Jewry has its ground in the fact that the metaphysics of the West, especially in its modern development, served as the hub for the spread of an otherwise empty rationality and calculative skill, which in this way lodged itself in the 'spirit' without ever being able to grasp the concealed domains of decision on its own […] Thus, Husserl's step toward phenomenological observation […] never reaches into the domains of essential decisions." Heidegger 1939–1941. GA 96, English Translation (2017b), p. 37.

[77] Di Cesare (2015).

been made by Giorgio Agamben in his very succesful Homo Sacer (1998), where he affirms that Nazism has his "condition of possibility in Western philosophy, and in particular, in Heidegger's onotology."[78]

So this involvement of philosophy and its tradition in the History of Being and the West's fate is in fact even more faithful to Heidegger's thought than the generic critique of modernity—meaning science, technology, industry—as ultimately leading to Auschwitz. Before going back to our main conclusion—that Socratic and Husserlian philosophy is indeed the core target of the so-called Being-Historical (*Seinsgeschichtlich*) anti-Semitismus, more generally of the whole scenography of the History of Being—let us listen to the voice of another Socratic philosopher of the last century, one who had been a fellow student of Hannah Arendt in Freiburg, but who developed a more lucid image of their teacher:

> At the heart of Heidegger's philosophy, we find this spirit, the most vivid of his thought, which is not, it seems, what some have called the "amazement before Being," but rather the *contempt* for everything that is not this amazement […] A burning, passionate, obsessive contempt for everything common, moderate, and generally accepted; for common sense, for rationality; for institutions, rules, and law; for everything men have invented, in the space in which they must live together, to confront their thoughts and their wills, to control their savage nature, to attenuate the rule of force. Global contempt, consequently, for western civilization, crystallized in three directions: democracy; science; and technology: for everything that, stemming from the spirit of Enlightenment, relies on what might be universal, in the Cartesian sense, in all human beings. All this is empty. Democracy is empty.[79]

10 The Philosopher and the Sophist

In Sect. 4 in Chap. 3 I proposed a definition of sophistry (as "the deliberate refusal to respect the epistemic values by subjecting one's statements to the rules grounded on them"). The conclusion of our argument on the

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[78] Agamben 1998, Part three, Ch. 4, Appendix.

[79] Hersch (1988, p. 476). See also Klibansky (1991, 139–158).

quality of Heideggerianism allows for an application, and maybe a further refinement of this definition, that will conclude our inquiry into the twentieth-century shipwreck of practical reason.

What can we object to the charge of complicity in anti-Semitism, launched against the whole philosophical tradition—in the company of St. Paul, the Fathers of the Church, Luther, and Shakespeare? The few examples we may choose are the ones mentioned by one of the accusers.

Kant is part of the gentle light of the Enlightenment: he belongs to the lineage of Lessing, Mendelssohn, Heine, and Husserl. In his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant ranks religions according to their distance from the ideal of moral autonomy. Like all of Pauline Christianity, he opposes the inner law to priestly command and ritualistic precepts, and like Grotius he sharply distinguishes the laws of the state from those of God. May he really be put on the side of the "responsible" for the Holocaust?[80] Kant, otherwise known as the most vigorous philosophical defender of moral and cosmopolitan universalism?

Gottlob Frege died in 1925, and we know he held racist opinions (thanks to his *Nachlass*, the posthumous diary). Can one go so far as to suggest a link between his Platonic "third realm" of thought and the *Third Reich*?[81] Frege is the philosopher whose theory of meaning as the truth-bearing capacity of expressions lays the foundations of a new dimension of our responsibility: that of our words. He gave Husserl (who would make it the basis of his *Logical Investigations*) the central idea of logical Socratism: logic is the ideal of fair speech, the ethics of thinking. Thanks to Frege, logic could and should become the heart of humanistic education. For it teaches us the semantic value of expressions, their role in contributing to the truth conditions of sentences, and trains one to the responsibility of one's language, the lack of which ends up destroying the most precious common good we have: the light of words. Logically

[80] Which is what Di Cesare does (Di Cesare 2018, p. 42), citing an infelicitous Kantian phrase on the "euthanasia of Judaism" without putting it in its context, which is that of a prediction of a progressive spiritualization of a religion still far from the status of "pure moral religion," as Roman Catholicism is, according to Kant, even more. Cf. Willaschek et al. (2015).

[81] This is why we find it arbitrary and unacceptable when Di Cesare writes that "certainly, it is not necessary to concern oneself with an author's anti-Semitism in order to read his treatise on logic, but Frege evoked numerous connections between the logical Reich and the theological and political Reichs" (Di Cesare 2018, p. 7).

irresponsible use of language in the public space, especially by those who have risen to run society and politics, attests to our fault as educators. Logical irresponsibility allows for the verbiage of pseudo-philosophical incantations and much journalistic chatter eluding any effort at being true to the facts, feeding the verbal sparring of talk shows and political marketing, or even the rhetoric of demagogues.

Frege is also the author of a well-known formula: "thought has no master." Frege's thought—like Plato's or Kant's—gives us eyes to see their errors and even judge their opinions. It is by the standard of Kantian universalism that we judge the expressions that betray it. With the Socratic standard of the "examined life," we deem Plato's closed society unacceptable. Likewise, it is with the Fregean standard of the truth-bearing capacity of words that we judge any statement of the racial superiority of one person over another to be not only obviously false, but for this reason, also vicious.

However, by Heidegger's standard, it is impossible to see his public and private judgments' inconsistency. It is impossible to apply to them the norms of those epistemic values (evidence, consistency, delimitation of concepts) that Heidegger's thought a priori dismisses as oblivious of Being.

Such is the criterion of the difference between a philosopher and a sophist, and it seems to be a fairly straightforward criterion. That it applies to Heidegger's case is equally clear, if only because the system of an author whose motto is "so much the worse for logic" contains the negation of every one of its propositions, allowing one to prove everything and its opposite. As a judgment tool, it is not worth much, whatever the subject, as we are about to see.

Let us come to the point of our distinction between philosophers and sophists. Its meaning is precisely the ancient one, the one that according to Husserl inspired Socrates' battles. At the same time, the theory of truth that we have in mind is the modern, post-Fregean one, the truth-conditional semantics, which, with its syntactic and pragmatic complements, forms the basis of our new responsibility in making use of language.

I am referring to *philosophical* language as well. The choice between acceptance and rejection of this logical (and thus ethical) responsibility of language was at stake in the splitting of the philosophical community

between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy during the first decades of the twentieth century.[82] Heidegger's most popular text, *What Is Metaphysics?*, dates back to 1929; it was very soon translated into many languages (thanks to this text, readers turned to *Sein und Zeit*, which was published in 1927, and Sartre would be heavily influenced by it in his *Being and Nothingness*, published in 1943). Rudolf Carnap's *The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language* was published in 1932. Its author shows how hard it is to talk about the being of nothingness without talking about nothing at all. Little remains alive today of Carnap's Manifesto in favor of verificationism because Carnap himself gave his successors—like Popper or Quine or Dummett—the tools to successfully refute the unsustainable part of his theories (according to our criterion, Carnap is certainly a philosopher and not a sophist). Yet little is required to bring to light the sophistical nature of Heideggerian language.[83] So much the worse for logic, Heidegger writes:

> If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into Nothingness and into Being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of "logic" in philosophy is thereby decided. *The idea of "logic" itself dissolves in the vortex of a more original questioning.*[84]

What also gets dissolved in this "vortex" is the ethical foundation of speech. Responsible use of words means that we are willing and able to assume responsibility for our affirmations—in the first place by constructing them in such a way that they have at least the possibility of being true or false. A sophist is someone who breaks the link between taking what another person says seriously and the truth claims that are implicit in any assertion. If we dissolve logic into a "more original questioning," the truth claim of any statement, in virtue of which asserting that p is equivalent to asserting the truth of p, will lose all meaning.

[82] "So-called" not only because it is absurd to oppose a method to a continent, but also because phenomenology, a style of thought that one of its classics (Moritz Geiger) defined as "a passion for distinctions" ended up being read through the deforming lens of Heidegger as a late form of Cartesianism or Neo-Kantianism.

[83] For an elementary exposition of Carnap's analysis of Heidegger's language, see De Monticelli (2006, Part 1).

[84] Heidegger (1993 [1929], p. 105). The translation has been slightly modified, emphasis added.

Consequently, any possibility of expressing *definite thoughts* will vanish, and so will the possibility of ascribing them to each other as beliefs, convictions, or propositions that we have expressed. We might talk and talk, but we will say nothing.

Once we dissolve this first norm of rational discussion, for which every statement counts as a commitment to the truth of the statement, the ideal structure of the *face-to-face* discussion collapses as well, and with it this norm of civilization or humanity, presupposed, we should never forget, also by the possibility we have of lying, which does not exist in the pre-human world. Without it, our ability to understand each other collapses, whether in philosophy and science or our everyday conversations about facts, values, and practical purposes.[85]

Once again, ethics and logic intertwine, as does their negation. We saw above which ethical principles Husserl had considered as pillars of the idea of Europe (Sect. 6 in Chap. 5). Heidegger built the edifice of his thought on the negation of precisely those principles, and on their replacement with two opposing principles: the idea of a destiny of the West, with the removal of both the autonomy and the *moral responsibility of individuals*; and the adoption of a principle of *community, ethnicity, and fate* as explicitly more fundamental than that of personhood. On this basis, it became possible to exalt the *Führerprinzip* and the bonds of soil and blood. Nevertheless, Heidegger kept being honored and studied as "the greatest philosopher of his century" in continental Europe for 50 more years,[86] as he is now, on the side of Marx and Confucius in the philosophy departments of post-communist China.

We might now have an answer to the question as to how all this has been possible. It has been possible because the sophist won in a considerable measure even in the minds of those who, because of feelings,

[85] It is worth noticing that, before being developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), these basic principles of pragmatic rationality were examined, and put to use for a refutation of "practical skepticism," in Husserl's *Lectures on Ethics* 1908–1914 (Husserl 1988).

[86] A partial remedy and a similar shock before the indifference of our time can be found in Giovani Piana's *Conversations on "The Crisis of the European Sciences" of Husserl*, with his thoughts on the difference between master and disciple, the former removed from his post because of his being Jewish, the latter writing defamatory letters in order to have Jewish colleagues removed. (Piana 2013). See Caminada and Summa (2020). Some attention to this context is paid also by Moran (2012).

personal history, and deep allegiances, should have detested the wolf disguised as the shepherd of Being. Instead, they succumbed to him, perhaps indirectly at least. The long dominating "Heideggerian" reading of Husserl's phenomenology was probably the main reason that kept most of the best philosophers in the traditions of Russell, Moore, Carnap, or Popper carefully ignorant of classic phenomenology. (A local episode of this splitting apart of analytical and continental philosophy was the goodbye letter that legal philosopher Bobbio wrote the Italian phenomenologist Enzo Paci (see Sect. 8 in Chap. 3).)

If we have dwelled so long on this painful knot of European philosophy, it is because much more is at stake concerning its future than simply a worn-out dispute over Nazism and philosophy. The fault of the legacy we have been discussing is, from a Socratic point of view, something worse than its complicity in the totalitarian adventures of the twentieth century—if anything, it explains this complicity. It is its sophistry. Nothing, not even a woefully misguided political allegiance, is worse for a thinker than sophistry. What is really dangerous is the sophist's professional indifference, or erasure of the difference between truth and falsity, between victim and executioner, between Enlightenment and Auschwitz, reason and arbitrariness. This is sophistry's work, as is the failure to distinguish between sophistry and philosophy, which achieves—even in milder, postmodern forms—the abdication of reason.

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6

Value: Prolegomena to a Phenomenological Axiology

Let us for the moment give the name value
to this common trait of intrinsic requiredness or
wrongness, and let us call insight *all awareness*
of such intellectual, moral or aesthetic value.
We can then say that value and corresponding
insight constitute the very essence
of human mental life.
—Wolfgang Köhler, *The Place of Value in a world of Facts*

1 A Look Backward

The preceding chapters introduced us to a phenomenology of the axiologically flattened world surrounding us. We became acquainted with the cynical consciousness or the subjective correlate of an ever more rampant and generalized process of erosion of ideality that seems to correspond to an apparent eclipsing or atrophying of the experience of value and disvalue in the public sphere—a widespread and troubling condition of civil apathy and rampant conformism. Public evils do not disappear from reality simply because awareness of them has become obscured; on the

R. De Monticelli, *Towards a Phenomenological Axiology*,
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contrary, a reduced awareness of disvalue is itself a disvalue, and makes the original disvalue a greater one. But why does the awareness of evil decrease?

I questioned our generally low regard for the role of philosophers and their importance in modern societies, even among educators—a low regard which confuses ideality with the ideologies of the past century. Democracy, I have argued, is not just a form of political organization or a type of government; it is a civilization founded on reason, on practical reason. To put it bluntly, our disillusionment with practical reason is the main symptom of our democracy's state of crisis. And if this crisis looms over us, it is in large measure also our fault as educators, who are as prone to be "converted to reality" as we are to absence from the battlefront of ideality.

We have pondered the question of Socrates' retreat. From morning to night, we are immersed in the experience of countless goods and ills: this is the most important and inevitable aspect of life in any community since the times of Adam and Eve—or, better yet, Cain and Abel. Philosophy in its Socratic key was born to shine a light precisely on this dimension, which is so central to our lives. However, if we look from the previous century up to the present, it is hard to pinpoint an aspect of human experience that philosophy has left more in the dark than the experience of value.

We have seen Simone Weil's accusatory finger pointed toward a city, Paris, invaded by the Nazis in 1941. However, this almost overwhelming darkness provided the fitting backdrop for our sense of amazement as we studied the normative embodiment of practical reason in the declarations and constitutions that changed the face of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. This century had seen the bankruptcy of that same practical reason. Ronald Dworkin's testament, which was published exactly 70 years later, in 2011, has guided us in the study of the powerful injection of ideality into the foundations of politics, both national and international, that has changed the democratic paradigm, founding it anew on universal rights and public ethics. This has also set us toward another future, a future of cosmopolitan legality and supranational democracies that beckons beyond the geopolitical jungle that still threatens us. Through this study, we have come to recognize the conspicuous

series of values that form the foundation of the normative documents of the nations, of Europe, and a large part of the world, where the hedgehog's claim (or Ronald Dworkin's theory of the consistency and coherence of the axiological universe and the objectivity of values) has given us a provisional definition of axiological cognitivism. Dworkin's view has appeared to be the most explicit contemporary awareness of practical reason as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and similar foundational normative documents.

At the same time, his theory—so isolated in the mainstream axiological skepticism and agnosticism that dominated the entire twentieth century and remains prevalent today—introduced us to the other face of the normative embodiment of practical reason, that is, its apparent separation from living philosophy, both within academic research and public debate. This analysis has, I hope, given more depth to understanding the phenomenon of the erosion of ideality that was our starting point. It somehow confirmed that, without the spirit, the flesh is corrupted. Paradoxically, then, the embodiment of practical reason in constitutions was accompanied by Socrates' retreat, the abandonment of the great theater of debate between value and fact, justice and force. The persisting self-abdication of the Socratic spirit from academic, educational, and public life, the puzzling choice of a sort of "epistemic abstinence"[1] by most philosophers supporting political liberalism (as opposed to "comprehensive liberalism," see Sect. 3 in Chap. 5), have given us a new perspective on the apparent loss of meaning and effectiveness we currently observe in democratic institutions: "epistemic abstinence" about axiological matters turns out to be a major cause of disenchantment. Epistemic abstinence in axiological matters means, in particular, giving up the commitment to a search for knowledge of what is a just society.

Finally, we have tracked various specimens of skeptical and agnostic wildlife—the foxes, wolves, and moths—that continue to silence the "hedgehog within us." We tracked several forms of axiological agnosticism, skepticism, and even nihilism. The hedgehog has become crushed between illiberal dialecticism—loaded with the obsession of "techno-financial-capitalist" occult powers and world conspiracies—and

[1] Raz (1990).

the drunk and dictatorial sophistry that catered to the Nazis and survived undisturbed for another 50 years, serving up hackneyed litanies on the uprooting, objectifying, and calculating reason of modernity. Our hedgehog is still silent, although astonished by the conversion to political realism that even the more liberal tradition has ended up accepting. Nevertheless, it has with growing hope returned to the less-traveled path of a renewed Socraticism, calling for a rediscovery of the universal, profound, and highly fragile roots of democracy in individuals' minds. These roots are as profound as our power to question each one of our acts, and as fragile as our commitment to truth and truthfulness—the only constraints on the arbitrariness of our will. We acquainted ourselves with Husserl's lucid and impassioned diagnosis of the "crisis," or rather the betrayal, of the European Enlightenment, which also included the prophecy of a renewed Europe, whereby the "functionary of humanity" unwittingly delivered philosophy into the hands of future fellow functionaries. Husserl, naturally, was innocent of any suspicion that hands would still do the work of hands, or that politics would again take its leave of ethics and logic; that the Idea of Europe—that is, a Europe "founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights"[2]—would again bow to the national intersts' pressure or even capitulate to "Fortress Europe"; or that the need to belong would divorce itself from the search for transparency in confronting reasons and values, both face-to-face with others and within ourselves.

In this final chapter, we will try to identify just a few concepts we can use to build a new theory of values and value experience. The previous chapters have prepared us for the coming analysis, offering us most of the intuitive examples needed for phenomenological research, such as the normative documents of the twentieth century and an admittedly brief

[2] Treaty of Lisbon (2007). Remark that the English version is strangely out of focus as concerns the fifth value, whose name in other languages refers to *Citizeship*. What is meant, is that Europeans are "citizens" of a new polity, and that the burden of a supranational democracy committed to the universal values rests essentially on their shoulders. The rule of law is the—obviously presupposed—operating mode of the new polity: but whether the institutions subject to the rule of law keep being inspired by the six values of this virtual European Constitution, or bow to national interests' pressure, almost entirely depends on the European citizens *as such*. A clear example of what I called "the code of silence" of conscience: see Chap. 3, Sect. 6.

discussion of the main theories opposed to axiological cognitivism. This makes it possible for us, in the *pars construens* of this chapter, to proceed more theoretically, by presenting a few theses rooted in the works of some classics of phenomenology, and to propose some new developments suggested by the questions we have discussed, in such a way as to bring the phenomenological approach to bear on contemporary debates in value theory.

2 The Principal Argument Against the Objectivity of Values: The Fact/Value Dichotomy

Ideality, reality, justification: if we were to identify three keywords for our reflections thus far, including our whirlwind tour through the twentieth century, perhaps I would choose these. They recall our fundamental themes: the erosion of ideality, the flattening of normality on the plane of mere factuality, and finally the disappearance of the demand for reason over and against arbitrariness, that is to say, Socrates' retreat from the public arena.

Now, these keywords cannot remain blank checks. We must translate them into the more definite concepts of a kind of axiological cognitivism that, in the end, can respond to the principal argument that has been raised against it for at least three centuries: how can ideals that have a role in action be based on the search for truth, given the controversial status of value-based properties, as opposed to "real" properties?

As is well known, Hume's principle of the non-derivability of "ought" from "is" is one of the passages that have given philosophers much to think about.[3] Even after having been questioned by academics, a Humean

[3] Hume discusses the problem in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, "On Morals." Here is one of his most celebrated passages: "In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the

dichotomy is quite *au courant* in ordinary discourse. How often do we hear: “Is it a judgment of fact or a value judgment?” Scientists, especially in the social sciences, generally defend the principle of value-neutrality for their sciences with the same pride as they defend their research’s scientific or intellectual honesty. They claim they are telling you how things are, not how they should be. They can formulate laws that predict what will happen given certain conditions, but they cannot prescribe your duties. They can best tell you what you should do if you wish to reach a certain goal—but certainly not which goals you should desire.

This all seems clear, but what does it actually mean? That no norm, much less an ethical norm, can be founded in the way an empirical law is founded, e.g., confirmed by the facts it can predict. No more than a universally necessarily true proposition—that is, necessarily true for all the individuals of a given kind—can be obtained by empirical induction. All the black ravens and all the sunrises we have seen certainly cannot suffice to rule out the possibility of future exceptions.

The fact that it is not the economists, the sociologists, or the psychologists, as such, who can tell us which moral—or even simply legal—rules we should abide by, besides being a mild source of relief, looks like something obvious. After all, it would be perfectly absurd that the economists, instead of telling us how the economy of a mafia controlled community works—and therefore, obviously, also what we should do *if* we wished to free ourselves from this control—insisted on repeating that we ought to free ourselves from mafia control (as if we could not figure this out without their science).

However, does this obviousness imply that there are no moral facts—or, in any case, what we would call value-laden facts—or that a value judgment cannot be objectively true or false? Does it imply that there are no goods or evils on this earth, that massacres and genocides, illnesses and unbearable poverty, arrogance and rudeness, a smile full of grace or a noble action, may not be facts? Or else, that all events, states, behaviors, situations—in short, all the facts—that I have listed are not real evils or

same time that a reason should be given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.” Hume (1978 [1739], p. 469).

goods? I am not sure which of the two hypotheses is stranger. Moreover, they converge and become one: goods and ills do not exist. Value- or disvalue-laden facts do not exist.

This is precisely what Hume thought, as his famous analyses of murder or the crime of ingratitude show. Let us take the case of willful murder.

> Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, that you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, toward this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any object or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it.[4]

This is the most classic expression of the forms of axiological skepticism called emotivism and expressivism. Even if expressed in the form of judgments, your axiological and moral theses will have no other meaning than an exclamation or, at most, a plea for societal sanctions against the murderer. This was the dominant theory among philosophers during the "springtime of analytic metaethics."[5] As is often the case with metatheories, metaethics was initially supposed to investigate the logic and semantics of moral judgments. Later on, the domain was extended to the metaphysics of values: what kind of entity is a value? Do values exist in some sense, or are they only a measure of our needs and desires?

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[4] Ibid.

[5] The very idea of metaethics (as opposed to normative ethics), that is, of a philosophical metatheory of moral judgments, or an inquiry into the meaning and reference of moral statements, is one of the classical products of the "Oxford springtime" of linguistic analysis. A quite accurate historical reconstruction of the main episodes of the post-Moorean metaethical debate in and beyond the age of the linguistic turn, then during the age of the normative turn after John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* was published in 1970, can be found in Darwall et al. (1992). The most comprehensive collection of essays, touching on a lot more topics than this one dilemma, is Shafer-Landau (2008). See also Shafer-Landau (2007) and Copp (2007).

One of the consequences of the initially dominant axiological non-cognitivism is that axiological and moral opinions are bound to remain nothing but opinions; they cannot be true, or at least well-founded opinions.

This is a position that has been around in the philosophical market-place since the times of Protagoras. It is undoubtedly striking that any news media user takes it for granted that a good reporter should qualify any value judgment by the words "but, naturally, this is just an opinion." Honest intentions certainly explain the origins of this habit: the desire to distinguish verified facts from evaluations, which might correspond to different orderings of axiological preferences supporting different political groupings in the pluralist arena of public debate. However, this does not in itself mean that there can be no true and no justifiable value judgment, that any value opinion is by its very nature bound to remain an opinion. This is what Protagoras, Hume, and Ayer, among many others, believe, but it is far from being evident. Consider: it is true—we all think—that a *good* journalist distinguishes facts from unverified opinions. Thus it is *true* that a journalist *should* tell them apart.[6] Or else, what do we mean by the former statement?

Still, there is something undeniable in Hume's passages that we have seen, or in the very distinction between reality and ideality that we have so heavily employed. But what exactly?

What cannot be denied is that no empirical science (including the social sciences and the sciences that study the mind, like psychology) can justify value judgments without giving up on its empirical methods of proof: induction and experimental confirmation. This is an important discovery: but is it sufficient to establish the kinds of axiological skepticism we have seen? After all, Hume's discovery was about how philosophy reawakened our ancestors from their "dogmatic slumber", as it reawakened Kant from dreaming that moral and legal norms could rest on a foundation of theological-metaphysical systems in which enlightened people were beginning to lose faith.

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[6] See http://www.phenomenologylab.eu/index.php/2015/03/moral-facts. What the example of the good journalist hints at is Husserl's way to "derive Ought from Is" (Husserl 2001, Prolegomena §§14–16). Cf. below, note 61.

This problem's awareness is precisely what led the founder of phenomenology to comprehensively reexamine modernity and the "crisis" of the "European sciences." Husserl's concern with modern science was later reduced to a complaint about the dislocation of transcendental subjectivity from science's foundations (what is worse, in a Heideggerian style, reproaching Galileo with a sort of oblivion of Being). However, in the *Crisis* as anywhere else, Husserl's focus is the common root of practical and theoretical reason, well known to the Enlightenment but entirely disregarded by modern naturalism and modern relativism. Modern sciences are ruled by epistemic values and relative norms. The quest for truth and evidence, however, seemed ruled out in matters of practical thought. In Husserl's ideal reconstruction of ancient and modern philosophy, the Socratic project remained unfinished: after the refutation of logical skepticism, axiological and practical skepticism had been left for modernity to address.[7]

Moreover, the eidetic of truth had undergone profound developments with Frege's groundbreaking work in the field of logic and the introduction of truth-conditional analysis.[8] An eidetic theory of the good that would be to substantial or "material" axiological research what formal logic was to the empirical sciences was still missing. Practical reason needed a theory of values that, while upholding the core truth of Hume's and Moore's insights, could block their skeptical consequences.

Filling this gap was the life task Max Scheler took on, followed by Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Moritz Geiger, Roman Ingarden, Aurel Kolnai, Herbert von Spiegelberg, Edith Stein, and others.

Indeed, what are we talking about if we are not even sure what we mean by "values"? If we are to follow Hume, we must throw them into the cauldron of "secondary qualities," having already decided that not even these—colors, flavors, sounds, scents of the world—"are qualities of objects, but perceptions in the mind."[9] Even today, this is undoubtedly the dominant academic approach: "secondary qualities" are confused with their "proximal stimuli," sensations; and sensations and emotions end up, along with

[7] Husserl (1956 [1923–24]).

[8] According to Michael Dummett, Frege's revolutionary move consisted in conceiving logic itself not in a traditional way, as the theory of valid inference, but as a theory of truth, that is of the truth-conditional meaning of the expressions (see Dummett 1981 [1973]).

[9] Hume, op. cit.

all other "qualia," constituting so-called "phenomenal consciousness"—the inexorably subjective and private part of the contents of consciousness.

However, values—in the current debate, the so-called "normative properties"—have had, in comparison with colors, a less uniform destiny. In the second half of the twentieth century, after a few decades of almost complete ostracism, things changed—this also followed the "great expansion" of practical philosophy that came out of Rawls's work.

Approaches providing alternatives to non-cognitivism have begun to come forth and multiply in variants as numerous as the "isms" we find in books on moral philosophy: so that the non-cognitivist/cognitivist divide continues to branch out—with emotivism, expressivism, projectionism, reductive naturalism, on the one hand, and on the other hand intuitionism, realism, non-reductive naturalism, quasi-realism, minimalism, Kantian constructivism, Humean constructivism, and so on.

The reader need not be frightened: we mention all of these offshoots and variants only to give an idea of the problematic richness of Hume's insight, from which these variants continue to emerge. In fact, how have we reached this point? Let us begin to take a look at where we started.

3 The Other Side of the Dichotomy

How far gone was the debate between Socrates and Protagoras at the beginning of the twentieth century? I would like to compare two philosophical traditions that give us a clear idea of what can happen when the Socrates of the moment is missing or cannot find a wide audience.

In Italy, in the early twentieth century, there was a talented emotivist and expressivist who had founded a philosophical journal—*La Critica*—destined to last 40 years or more: Benedetto Croce. What follows is a passage from one of his texts published there in 1915:

> Those judgments [value judgments], taken in their form which is approval or blame, are no true judgments (logical judgments), but sentimental expressions by which we […] detach ourselves from the past to embrace the present, and make progress relative to ourselves, or exhort and urge other to make progress.[10]

[10] Croce (1915).

As we can see, Protagoras is well represented here in a neo-idealist or historicist form, as is the frame of Croce's thought. Unfortunately, Croce does not provide the slightest argument in defense of this position, which serves to complete his doctrine of the will or the "practical spirit." In fact, his purpose is not so much to argue but rather to emphasize the "obviousness" of this thesis in the face of the "usual tricks that lack of reflection can play on us by way of metaphors of language." Thus, in his own way Croce is also something of an analyst of ordinary language (Wittgenstein would have admired this):

> This is how absurd questions are born, questions like what is the True, the Good, the Beautiful, objectively and in itself; and the absurd theoretical proceedings in which one sees how, given those ideas, sitting still, man conducts himself toward them, understands them, imitates them, activates them, betrays them or rebels against them; and, at last, the dissatisfaction that these doctrines leave us with, from which one cannot escape if not with reconquering the awareness that there is not Truth, but the thought that thinks, no Good, but moral will, no Beauty, but poetic and artistic activity.[11]

This is not the place to reflect on what philosophical ethics in twentieth-century Italy has amounted to. However—speaking of "absurd questions"—if Croce found the very idea of investigating the nature of value absurd, it is not surprising that we will not find many Italian intellectuals willing to take up the ongoing Socratic work of asking for reasons concerning the things that "wills" want. Croce himself did not feel the need since he thought that wills either are the docile servants of history and represent the robust reasons of the winning side, or else they are vain wishes.

In Italy, in the first half of the twentieth century, we find even fewer Socratic philosophers than professors who refused the fascist loyalty oath. In this context, we should not forget thinkers who did refuse it, at a high personal cost, like Calogero, Capitini, and Martinetti.[12]

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[11] Croce (1924, p. 63). My translation.

[12] Guido Calogero (1904–1986) worked out a "philosophy of dialogue" that anticipated Habermas and his ethics of discourse; moreover—apropos the unity of value—he regarded liberalism and socialism not "as opposed ideals or incomparable concepts, but parallel specifications of a unique ethical principle" (cited in Bobbio 1997, p. 45). Aldo Capitini (1899–1968), a theoretician of non-

Croce's political realism of the 1920s allows us to understand why this European champion of liberty was at first defined as a fascist without the black shirt. With Italian Neo-Hegelianism—an "idealism" that could not have been more politically realistic—we go, alas, from bad to worse, finally reaching Giovanni Gentile's Ethical State. It was Gentile, nevertheless, who made Italian high schools worthy of admiration for another half-century; my generation, paradoxically, still owes him the broad horizons that the study of the entire Western cultural and philosophical tradition can impart. Unfortunately, we also owe him the skeptical inclination that historicism developed in us from our early days in school, as we became always used to looking only for the context of certain doctrines or the purposes they served: asking whether they were true or false was a question that would make a historicist smile.[13]

Let us return to the "absurd questions" and move to the English context. In 1903, G. E. Moore published his *Principia Ethica*. As one of the fathers of analytic philosophy, Moore did not find it at all absurd, nor did he consider it excessively speculative, to devote what would become his masterpiece to the question of "what is the Good, objectively and in itself?" In any case, this is no more absurd than devoting one's entire life to the analogous question about truth, as Frege, the other putative father of analytic philosophy (or grand-father, at least), had done for the modern theory of truth in modern logic.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the extraordinary flowering of logics—starting with Frege's Platonism and its alternatives—Hilbert's Formalism, Brouwer's Intuitionism—once again opened wide horizons of philosophical research all across Europe (including Italy with Peano's Axioms), as had happened at the dawn of Greek philosophy. Once more, new findings about the idea of truth changed the standards of philosophical thought. In his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl, who was trained as a mathematician, takes over formal logic as the theory of truth and

violent action, was, along with Calogero, a founder of the Partito d'azione; he strongly criticized the 1929 State–Church Agreement as legitimizing fascist government and was fired from his academic position by Giovanni Gentile. Piero Martinetti (1872–1943) refused the fascist loyalty oath and retired to write philosophy as "the religion of the reasonable man."

[13] If a personal note is allowed: I still remember my intense emotion when as a brand-new graduate student at Oxford I discovered that this was, instead, the only question for the others also that made sense. The universe, as if it were new, opened up for me.

distills its essence with a depth and a clarity that none of his contemporaries can approach. Formal logic, when couched in a syntactically and semantically definite language, yields the logical weight of its expressions, that is their role in determining the truth or falsity of the sentences in which they occur. In other words, logic is a theory of truth insofar as it makes for a truth-conditional analysis of sentences, based on which one can prove the validity of its schemes of inference, instead of taking it for evident in the case of a few "canonical" forms, and reducing the other schemes to that canonical form, as in Aristotelian syllogistics. This is a dramatic advance in the awareness we gain of meaning and language, and the related responsibility in their use. Formal logic makes the epistemic values and disvalues of our speech (clarity, definiteness, consistency, referentiality) quite transparent. For this reason, its study should not be opposed to the study of ethics, moral philosophy, and value theory. On the contrary, the former should be an introduction to the latter.

This in-depth analysis of the constraints our thoughts must meet to be possible truth-bearers is a glorious achievement of Frege's formalization of logic. Husserl grasped the philosophical relevance of presenting formal logic as a theory of truth, that yields its theoretical foundations to the "normative discipline" of logical inference. Logic is even, in Husserl's *Prolegomena* (Husserl 2001), the paradigm and model for his general claim that "normative disciplines" are to be founded on "theoretical disciplines." This is the background of Husserl's bold thesis that while the theory of truth had been an essential and successful achievement of philosophy, the theory of value is a still unfulfilled task haunting the whole of modernity. At the same time in England E.G. Moore, widely read in the phenomenological circles, had independently resolved to take on the other half of the job: a theory of the Good. However, this other enterprise would not end well—at least from the Socratic point of view. Or maybe it would, but in the sense that we reach a state of aporia that remains unresolved, as Moore himself confessed, for 40 years. That, in a sense, continues to this day.

Moore addresses the other side of Hume's thesis, or rather, of the truth that Hume's thesis expresses in terms of the non-existence of values. You shall never find among the "real" or "natural" properties of things in the world what it is that makes a good thing good. Take the most charming

of women: are you perhaps able to say what it is that makes her charming by listing her real characteristics, size, weight, measurements, complexion, eye shape, psychological traits, and so on? Take a brave man and list his behaviors in given situations: would you perhaps be able to say that all and only those who behave in these ways are brave? Is there perhaps a set of characteristics that describes a person who is just and yields the properties common to all the just? Consider that even if you could establish properties common to all charming women, you would only describe the (supposed) properties common to some *women*, not the peculiarity of charm as such. For, naturally, there are also ravishing people in the masculine half of the sky. What is it that all the works of art in the Louvre have in common—what are the properties that a painting, a sculpture, must have to be aesthetically successful?

Let there be no misunderstanding: these questions are not at all without meaning. It makes much sense to study the nature of charm, bravery, moral goodness, or beauty. We would not wish to consider the study of aesthetics pointless simply because we have run up against this obstacle: that we cannot define properties common to beautiful things. First, we should clarify why "real" properties do not help explain beauty or goodness.

Let us take an example. What are the characteristics of a just society? We can use Dworkin's analyses from Chap. 3: and we will agree that a just society must be such as to ensure equal dignity to each person, along with the kind of liberty required to be able to assume responsibility for one's own life, and—if possible—to construct a good or happy life. In any case, a life respectful of one's duties towards others. To sum up: we have analyzed one axiological property—justice as a political value—in terms of other axiological properties. We might wish to adopt other theories of justice: we will not escape this limit. We cannot explain axiological properties in terms of non-axiological properties. This will always be the case when studying any axiological property, no matter which one, despite some philosophers—typically, on the realist-naturalist side of the meta-ethical debate—argue against Moore's anti-naturalistic stance. I shall hint at the reason why I find that unconvincing in the next section.

Therefore, we cannot explain *axiological properties in terms of non-axiological properties*. This truth was already clear to Plato, who, for this

reason, defines goodness as that which is "beyond being." Unfortunately, he postulated another kind of reality—a supernatural or metaphysical reality. However, this is a step too far for the phenomenologist because she can no longer see anything clearly in that invisible world.

So, here we have the other side of the fact/value dichotomy: the irreducibility of axiological or normative properties to "real" properties, that is to say—according to the vague terminology used today—"natural" properties.

As we have stated, Moore sees this other side, which suggested to him his famous argument about the naturalistic fallacy or the open-question argument. No matter what natural property one chooses, in terms of which to "define" goodness, one will end up with an "open question," which calls into question the very goodness of the things that enjoy that property. This reveals that the attempted definition is not a definition—it does not "capture" what we had in mind. If, for example, you say that the goodness of a good thing consists of the pleasure it causes, or in its utility, or in its being desired, we will still be able to ask: but is this pleasurable thing also good? Is the useful thing in question also good? Is the desired thing also desirable?

Mountains of literature have been devoted to demonstrating that this presumed fallacy is not at all so (otherwise, it would not even be possible to explain the concept of water in chemical terms simply because a thirsty person does not recognize the H_2O molecules that we indeed find on comets, but in quantities too small to look like water). Be that as it may, let us point out the single move in Moore's argument that brings about both a precious insight and a conceptual mistake.

The precious insight is that the content of an axiological property[14] is undeniably irreducible to other non-axiological properties. This reveals the very nature of ideality. The mistake lies in concluding that value is indefinable and ineffable, period. It is indefinable only in terms of

[14] This terminology is not standard, the word "content" being usually employed in reference to *concepts* ("conceptual content"). Now what I refer to by this word, if anything, is a *non*-conceptual content. See Sect. 5 and notes 23 and 24. The word, on the other hand, is an implicit reminder of what Husserl, in his Third Logical Investigation *On Wholes and Parts*, calls a "non-independent part" or a moment, that is, in our case, an aspect or a feature of a whole axiological quality. Being handy, for example, is a partial content of *utility* in the case of a cutting tool. See Husserl (2001 [1900, 1913]), Third Research—On the Theory of Wholes and Parts, Part I, §§ 2–5.

non-axiological properties, the ones that the open question argument blocks. So, Moore's most famous proposition is marred by a fallacy: "Our first conclusion as to the subject-matter of Ethics is, then, that there is a simple, indefinable, unanalyzable object of thought by reference to which it must be defined."[15]

Certainly, this ideal object, in its simplicity and non-analyzability, to some extent resembles the image of the sun, symbolic of Plato's Idea of the Good—and much more closely resembles the *ipsum bonum* of the Neoplatonists, blinding to our nocturnal, bat-like minds with the unbearable simplicity of its light (according to Saint Thomas Aquinas' poetic image). However, are we sure this is a good starting point for an inquiry into the Idea of the Good? Would it have been a good starting point in the realm of logic to continue to contemplate the unique ideal object that all true propositions refer to—truth in itself, indefinable and simple—instead of studying how the truth of a complex proposition depends on the truth of its simple parts, and the truth of a simple proposition on the references of its parts?

As to the "eidetic" of the good, this "starting point," instead, represented the end of it—as already announced in that melancholic proposition early in Moore's long treatise:

> My business is solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for. What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea, and about this I am extremely anxious to arrive at an agreement. But, if we understand the question in this sense, my answer to it may seem a very disappointing one. If I am asked What is good? my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked How is good to be defined? my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it.[16]

So it was that among Moore's critics, the very argument concerning the naturalistic fallacy began to bite the hand that fed it: its Humean side came back to the forefront, while its Moorean side faded into the background. As we mentioned earlier, many years later Moore responded to

[15] G. E. Moore (2004 [1903], §15).

[16] Ibid., §6.

his critics that if he had been compelled to say which side of the debate, cognitivist versus non-cognitivist, he by now favored, he would have found himself in a predicament. This attests to his intellectual honesty.[17]

Indeed, this, too, was a Socratic response.

4 Metaethics: Another Way of Resigning from Socratic Research?

Nonetheless, something (actually, quite a lot) remained of Moore's rediscovery of the other side of the fact/value dichotomy: the question of the nature of normative properties.

What Moore's heirs today refer to as "a by-now defunct Platonic intuitionism" was first jettisoned by his critics and eventually by Moore himself. The issue, however, not only survived for another hundred years but has now led to a flourishing of "isms" of ever more complex and subtle alternative responses as sketched out above.

This is not surprising, as three major exponents of the contemporary metaethical debate observe: the current controversy begins precisely with Moore's discovery of something that resides in the very nature of normative or axiological properties, and resists attempts to explain them either in naturalistic or metaphysical terms.[18] Moore had concisely traced back all previous moral philosophy to either one or the other of these two errors. The "constructivist" option, plausibly, had been considered safe from Moore's objection by many—especially after Rawls again proposed a sort of Kantian intersubjective procedure for the validation of principles, but in a version free of some of the less digestible Kantian doctrines, such as synthetic *a priori* judgments, noumena, and other mysterious things. Eventually, after the non-cognitivist we witnessed the neo-cognitivist tide, itself divided into various currents of constructivism and realism.[19]

[17] Darwall et al. (1992, p. 121).

[18] Ibid., p. 115.

[19] For an introduction to the conundrums of contemporary constructivisms, see Bagnoli (2013); for reference works on moral realism, see Shafer-Landau (2003) and Enoch (2011).

So we reach the contemporary academic metaethical realm—that is to say, a realm of reflection that, as is the case with Moore, no longer has anything directly to do with principles of ethics, but is concerned precisely with the question of whether there is something that can make ethical judgments true, or whether this does not exist; and if there is, whether such truth makers are facts (and of what type: natural or supervenient to the natural facts, and in that case reducible to the latter or not); or whether it consists of something else, for example, shared validation criteria. Thus the whole question is about the status of the axiological or "normative" properties denoted by the value predicates we use. To sum up, most discussions in metaethics turn around the following dilemma: either value properties are "real" properties, they are "in" real things, but then they get "naturalized," and lose their normativity; or they are "ideal," meaning that they inhabit another, Platonic world, but then they are "queer" creatures.[20]

"The live question is not whether ethical or moral judgments can be true, but which are true."[21] This is, not by chance, the opinion of our guide across the realm of "embodied practical reason" in Chap. 3: Ronald Dworkin. It represents a kind of articulate sigh that could come from any survivor of an authentic experience of moral or political discord who wanted to keep up on contemporary moral philosophy.[22] I want to take you (the reader) on a short trip in the realm of metaethics to see if you, too, would respond with a sigh.

[20] As is well known, the charge of "queerness" was first introduced by J. L. Mackie, based on remarks such as the following: "If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (Mackie 1977, p. 38).

[21] Dworkin (2011, p. 26).

[22] Dworkin actually painstakingly tries to answer all objections to his critics, not only in Dworkin (2011), but also during a "Symposium on Dworkin" (1996), available online at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Philosophy/bears/symp-dworkin.html. A second "Symposium on Dworkin" (2011) also gave rise to proceedings at https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/8715039. Sympathizing with Dworkin's dismissal of metaethics does not, of course, imply sharing his idea that the questions about existence (whether values exist) are just to dismiss in favor of normative questions (which axiological judgments are true). My claim, inherent in the bottom-up approach to axiology I propose, is rather that "the questions what" (what are values?) precedes "the question whether" (whether values exist), for the mode of existence of something F depends on the nature of F. Cf. Sect. 5.

If it seems to you that torture, for example, is in itself intrinsically "bad"—and therefore morally unacceptable in every case—but you wish to go deeper into the reasons for this conviction, you will soon find out that it is not possible to do so without investigating what "torture" is, what are the essential characteristics of what we can call torture. However, the metaethical philosopher will, first of all, ask you to take sides on whether facts that would make your judgment of torture true exist or not—and suddenly, you find yourself in the middle of a debate on the supervenience of normative properties. If you believe that morally abominable facts like torture exist, you will have to take a position on the existence of the properties that characterize them—like the "cruelty" that is characteristic of torture; and you will again end up trapped between the alternatives of Hume and Moore, ad infinitum. Let us assume we concede that these properties are different (since they are normative) from the "natural" properties of a torture session—such as the voltage of the electric shocks or the length of the ropes—and that, however, such properties cannot exist without a foundation of this type and that they supervene on it.

At this point, you must decide whether to maintain that the properties are irreducible to their foundation, from which your interlocutor will judge them "strange": for then, where are they? Are they in one's mind, where Hume put them? "But, in that case, farewell moral facts," you think. "And then what can stop the opinion maker who decides without shame to write in a leading national newspaper that, given a pressing *raison d'état*, torture is legitimate? It would wind up being just an opinion like any other!"[23] But if you choose the other side of the dilemma and allow the properties constitutive of torture to be reduced to "natural" properties of some kind, they will immediately lose their normativity—stating how things *should not* be, rather than a physical law stating how things are. (*Sollen*, not *Müssen*, Kant would say.)

Besides, where will you search for evidence to decide between the two possibilities?

[23] Cf. Alhof (2005) and Panebianco (2006). It is a right of a journalist to express an opinion legitimizing torture, even if there is a law against the crime of torture. In any event, it is a right of anybody to think that it is a false opinion: but how to support this claim rationally, if there is no truth or falsity in this domain? And how to refute it?

To abbreviate and simplify: let us assume you believe that torture is unacceptable in itself, regardless of how much it is or is not accepted and practiced. The metaethical discussion on the existence of moral facts seems to drag you into the sterile alternative between a supernatural metaphysics (normative properties exist in things because God has placed them there, along with the things' ends) and a naturalist metaphysics (normative properties supervene on natural ones like liquidity supervenes on the make-up of water molecules). Sterile, because it does not appear that either of these metaphysics responds to the issues that arise when confronted with certain behaviors that you are unsure whether to define as cruel. To know whether or not cruelty is a property supervening on natural properties of a specific behavior—the force of a punch or the energy of its impact—does not give you the slightest help in determining whether or not this behavior is cruel: or which behaviors are cruel. It would not help you grasp the qualitative contents of cruelty in conceptual terms, such as clarifying which goods it destroys or why torture would be unacceptable even if it might turn out to be useful. Thus, on our own, we have come to share Dworkin's sigh: "The live question is not whether ethical or moral judgments can be true, but which are true."

There is only one approach, as far as I know, that can block this switch to a different kind of inquiry—metaethics understood as metaphysics of moral facts—and blocks it by a fundamental rule of methods, according to which the nature of a thing can only be accessed in the original or at least in the imagined presence of the thing itself. It is impossible to speculate about values without the presence of the goods and evils that exemplify them, even if they were imaginary examples, as in the theater, onscreen, or in a novel. Sometimes essential constants of qualities like cruelty, jealousy, ingratitude, and cowardice can emerge in an even purer and more vivid form in a fictional setting—despite being embodied in the characters and inseparable from the personality they manifest. In this way, we see that cruelty is definitely of this earth and not of a Platonic realm, without necessarily being bound to our biology or our institutions (we know enough of fairy tales and science fiction to see this last point).

This approach, not surprisingly, is phenomenology—and it has not arrived too late to help us: because we have been making use of it from the very beginning of this book. The continual moving away from books

and the armchair to go out into the world and then return to books and to the language of philosophers, this back-and-forth between real-life situations and the careful examination of philosophers' thinking that real life can allow by providing possible cases in point, is the basic practice of phenomenology.

Before taking up again the whole issue in phenomenological terms in the next section, one last remark should conclude our brief trip across the academic realm of metaethics. Notice that the metaethical debate is essentially about the questions "whether" and "where" values exist, assuming the question on the nature of values depends upon the answer given to the question on their existence. Here Moore's refusal to inquire into the contents of value properties, that is, into the "matter" of a "material axiology" ("good is good, and this is the end of the matter") was accepted by almost all his successors, including his adversaries.[24]

However, whether values exist is a puzzling question for the man on the street, whose naïve perspective we have been adopting all along. The lifeworld is stuffed full of ills and goods of all sorts and sizes, as we have verified in the preceding chapters. It is almost impossible to enjoy a minute of sheer "neutrality" within it. Before being talked about and referred to as normative properties, values are experienced as qualifying the countless goods and ills (or real evils) we are acquainted and familiar with from everyday life. There is, in fact, a striking silence about the lifeworld in the realm of metaethics. Or even more than silence, its complete disappearance from the sight of most academic philosophers, which manifests itself in the top-down kind of strategy philosophers adopt in arguing in favor or against skepticism about value cognition.

[24] Prescriptivism, which always accompanied noncognitivism, has it that, "of course," even "thick" value terms, such as "brave" or "cruel," only have a descriptive, non-axiological content "to which a prescription has been attached" (see Williams 1985, p. 144). For example: "brave" refers to a certain behavior, as it can "naturally" be described, without making use of any other value term. This is the mainstream account of thickness, given by Hare and reinforced by Bernard Williams. William's text goes on: "It is essential to this account that the specific or 'thick' character of these terms is given in the descriptive element. The value part is expressed, under analysis, by the all-purpose prescriptive term ought." Williams attributes this account to Hare (1981, p. 21); while criticizing it, but not on the essential point, namely that the only "thickness"—or the only descriptive contents of value terms—is of a non-axiological kind, and the whole axiological weight is carried by an attached "all-purpose" normative force.

Might this not be the latest way, the most subtle, of resigning from Socrates' profession?

We cannot be content with a cursory answer to this question. On the one hand, the shortcomings of academic metaethics are no good reason to dismiss metaethics as such. So much less so, as most academic metaethics reverse the right order of questions, right at least in a phenomenological perspective. One cannot know *whether* values exist before knowing *what* they are. Another drawback in the current metaethical approach is its apparent narrowness—why metaethics rather than axiology, since value judgments are of all sorts and not just moral? Thus, setting the right frame to answer the questions raised by metaethics is a necessary step, and even the most important one in our research into the foundation of practical reason.

On the other hand, if this indispensable stage becomes eternalized in defense of an "ism," if it shifts to a different register that removes the facts that formed the initial basis of the inquiry itself—the phenomena that originally spurred it on—then a philosophical question turns into a merely academic matter. Then the means of philosophy become its ends instead: we enter the realm of the Byzantine.

5 Unity and Plurality of Values: The Foundations of an Axiology

There is no doubt that the origin of our investigation lies in finding evils and goods in the world: scandalously unacceptable events, like massacres and genocides; events not directly caused by those in power, like pandemics; the destruction of treasured landscapes and other most vulnerable parts of one's country's cultural heritage; or events that challenge what we feel to be most valuable in human life, such as when those who hold power (institutions, the people who represent them) suppress the demand for truth that lies at the core of every demand for justice, confusing right and wrong, the noble and the base, to the point of killing—in the silence of indifference—the moral identity of the just persons who are alive or the memory of the dead. Yet our research also results from finding events that redeem the darkness of so many days: the splendor of the mountain

snow on some mornings in March, the indescribable perfection of a baroque musical passage, the grace of an attentive gesture—and the greatness of philosophical thought when it truly illuminates life.

Thus, there is a kind of axiological "realism" and "cognitivism" integral to this investigation and its purpose: but it cannot be its point of arrival since it is only its starting point. Goods and ills are undoubtedly given or experienced as occurring. The purpose of the investigation is to understand exactly *what* makes experienced things (events, situations, actions, etc.) good or bad in any relevant senses, i.e., *what* values are. Existential claims are empty in the absence of any notion of *what* is claimed to exist (or not). For the mode of existence of a being, and its identity conditions and its causal powers, depend on the being at stake. The point of our research is not to assess whether values exist or not, but what the givens (the experiences we make of them) tell us about their nature, their mode of being and of being there, the ways of extending and deepening our knowledge of them, and to avoid illusions and mistakes about them.

Another experience is perhaps familiar to many among those who take philosophical research seriously and, therefore, also follow the rules that pertain to its discussions, heed the technical aspects of the lexicon and the arguments, and achieve the required degree of specialization. They, too, can undergo the experience of losing sight of the intuitive content of one's questions and the very matter[25] of one's investigation in moving from the first to the second order of discourse: in our case, from normative ethics or moral philosophy to metaethics (more generally, from substantive research on some axiological domain, aesthetic, moral, legal, political, to the relevant meta-theories, ontologies of art, metaethics, social ontologies). It is the discouraging experience of losing sight of the

[25] "The term 'material' is a more ambiguous term in the English language than '*material*' in German. Scheler and Hartmann's phrase is '*die materiale Werthethik*.' 'Material' contrasts with *materiell*. The latter German term refers to matter as an adjective modifying an object, asserting its materiality. 'Material' means 'substantive' and refers to the substance of something that may not be physical at all, the content of an argument at law, for example. Scheler and Hartmann use the term to indicate that their ethics is not a formal, rule-based theory, as was that of Kant, but one that exhibits *phenomenologically* the value-material from which all moral rules are drawn" (Kelly 2011, p. 8, my emphasis). Because of this ambiguity, Kelly remarks, Frings chose to translate *materiale* in the title of Scheler's masterpiece, *Der Formalismus und die Materiale Ethik der Werte* by a purely negative expression: *Formalism and Non-Formal Ethics of Value*. Cf. Scheler (2009 [1913/16, 1927]) and Scheler (1973 [1916]).

objective and almost substituting means for ends—an all-too-human affliction that one escapes only with difficulty.

Now, let us go back to our investigation of where Moore made his conceptual blunder in the middle of the significant insight he was trying to put into words. Remember, the precious point was: there is, undeniably, in every axiological property some content that is irreducible in terms of other properties that are not axiological (this is the nature of ideality). The blunder is the assumption that such content is not explicable in terms of other properties, period—therefore, it is a "simple object, indefinable, unanalyzable." *Bonum ineffabile*, the good is ineffable. "Ineffable" may be an excellent description of the divine when one is struck by one of its rays, as far as we know (considering the entire mystical and theological tradition as well)—but certainly not an apt description for general application to any axiological content.

However, if, instead, our explication occurs in terms of other axiological properties, Moore's "open question" signals—whatever variety of goodness is under inquiry—the object's inexhaustibility as an infinite source of information. If, after characterizing a just society in Dworkin's terms (and therefore explicating it in terms of the axiological properties of equality in dignity and of liberty as one's own responsibility for a good life, plus the welfare required for it), we ask ourselves if a truly non-discriminatory society, organized in such a way that everyone can take on free and full responsibility for their lives, is also really a just society, we will probably answer that it is a society more just than those in which we live. However, we may also observe that while these conditions are necessary, they are not sufficient: how many other "parts" or additional aspects of justice will the daily experience of social evils suggest to us as being necessary? What will we do about our landscapes and cultural heritage? About our past? About the lives of animals? About the rights of the daughters and sons to come? About the growth of uncontrolled powers that escape the jurisdiction of governments?

The fruitfulness of the open question shows that the very idea of boiling down the investigation of the nature of value(s) to a definition of the good ends up foiling the very idea of a search for truth, the very idea of objectivity and an inexhaustible variety of contents of every domain of values. At the same time, and in a certain way, it humiliates and foils the

hedgehog's insight (which is Moore's insight, too) about the unity of value(s). We recognize this insight in the foremost modern Platonists, like Moore and Frege, in Simone Weil's passage that opened Chap. 3 of this book, and Dworkin's which opened Chap. 4.

It is not in Moore's sense that we should interpret the insight about the unity of value(s)—that "large and old philosophical thesis" (Dworkin), as old, indeed, as Plato's philosophy. Pausing indefinitely to contemplate the unity of truth that all true propositions in some way share would not have allowed us to make great strides in the field of logic. Undoubtedly, however, the fact that in each case we can speak of a truth—whether we are speaking of the particular color of this table, or of the Pythagorean theorem or the logical principle of non-contradiction—should arouse our sense of philosophical wonder. There are certainly as many different truths as there are true propositions, yet they are all truths. They must indeed have something in common. What is it? First of all, of course, they are all propositions.

What do all the things, situations, events, and acts that are in some way good have in common? First of all, obviously, that they are goods. However, there are countless kinds of goods. A true proposition, too, is a good of a specific kind, even if what makes it a good is not only its truth value, but also its informative value, other epistemic values such as its clarity and precision, and so on.

We must admit it: the goods and ills surrounding us are countless and very different in kind, because such are the values that make them the goods and ills they are. We cannot ignore this when trying to elucidate this idea of the unity of value.

In Sect. 4 in Chap. 4, we identified three different senses of axiological plurality. We considered the first sense of the claim about the plurality of single values to be obvious. It is obvious concerning ordinary language and common sense, as it is for the academic debate on normative properties. However, what we are talking about when we talk about values is still anything but obvious. Until this is further clarified, the other two theses will also remain unclear: the thesis of the plurality of the spheres of value—without which we cannot even explain the claim that moral values do not make up all the values—and the thesis of the plurality of

rankings of values—without which we cannot make sense of the nature of conflict or disagreement about value(s).

How then are we supposed to understand the thesis of the unity of value?

We made a suggestion in Sect. 3 in Chap. 4: the hedgehog's thesis is actually a claim of consistency regarding the knowledge of values. In general, the unity of value is to axiology as the unity of the truth value *true* is to logic. To be true, a thesis must not be incompatible with another true thesis. And this is also the case where axiological claims are concerned. This is just an application of logic to a special domain of research.

Axiological claims can first of all be value judgments—that is, judgments that attribute positive or negative value to something, qualifying it as a good or an ill. They are, indeed, claims (true or false) about given, existent, and contingent goods and ills.

Second, axiological claims can be claims about values themselves, that is, theses of axiology. Let us call them axiological statements (properly speaking).

Axiology is general or special. That is, it concerns (1) the nature of values as such, regardless of their subject matter or content; or (2) the content of given values and the relationships they have with other values, both on a horizontal axis (webs of values) and a vertical one (rankings of values). In the preceding chapters, we provided examples of special axiological statements: the analysis of justice and of its components (interconnections, webs), and its relationship with the flourishing of individual lives (rankings, priorities).

In these conclusive sections, we will set out a few theses of general axiology, as in level 1. This general axiology—simply because it speaks of values and not of the goods that exemplify them, of elegance or friendship and not of elegant pieces of furniture or particular friends—attributes all values a kind of independent objectivity—independent of that of the goods that exemplify them. Special axiologies would bring to light the consistency of the concerned special axiological statements—though this is a topic for another study.

"Independent objectivity" means that axiological theses of type 1 and 2, if they are true, are necessarily true—that is to say, true in all worlds

where there are goods and ills that realize the values in question.[26] Therefore the norms (or requirements, demands, exigencies) that these values ground have the same universal and *a priori* validity, even if their deontic status will vary with the type of value. A requirement of balance in one's diet, an invitation to relax by the affordance of an armchair, a demand of musical harmony in the development of a fugue will certainly be met by more possible choices than a moral *Aut-Aut* emanating from honesty, and will not share the categorical status of the latter's right choice.

"Independent objectivity" of the axiological theses means, moreover, that the way of justification—and therefore the type of evidence that allows us to recognize their truth (or falsity)—is *a priori*, that is, not based on empirical induction.

In other words, both from a modal and from an epistemic point of view, the axiological statements are non-factual and non-empirical truths. Axiological statements of type 2, to be sure, differ in that they have content or a "matter," are "informative" or "substantive": they make up the bulk of "material" axiology.[27] In fact, some of these truths actually represent great "discoveries": the axiological difference between revenge and justice, the axiological difference between arbitrary power and the rule of law, secularism, tolerance, the equal dignity of all persons, the axiological

[26] Suppose justice is realized to a fuller degree—that is, by embodiment of more component values in the justice web in w1 than in w2, and to a degree 0 in w3. Justice is then all the more required in w3, so it's "present through its absence" or present only as an ideal. In the set of formal axioms on values such as those that phenomenologists developed starting from Brentano in 1889 and taken up by Scheler, this presence-through-absence, which is obviously given in the construction of the very term "injustice," is formalized by the second of these four axioms: (1) the existence of a positive value is itself a positive value; (2) the non-existence of a positive value is itself a negative value; (3) the existence of a negative value is itself a negative value; (4) the non-existence of a negative value is itself a positive value. Cf. Scheler (1973, p. 26).

[27] In the terminology of classical phenomenology, material axiology splits up into axiological spheres or regions, which are to formal axiology, or the general theory of values, webs, and rankings, what "material ontologies" are to formal ontology (see Husserl (2012), *Ideas* I, §§9–17; and Husserl (2001) *Logical Investigations*, Prolegomena, §§ 67–70). Max Scheler distinguishes four spheres, or axiological regions, correlated to the sensory, vital, personal, and religious layers of our emotional sensibility (1973, pp. 104–110); yet the intricacies of these doctrines need not detain us: a phenomenological axiology up to the standard of rigor of contemporary philosophical research is nowadays a work in progress. For a quite accurate reconstruction of classical texts, especially by Max Scheler and Nikolai von Hartmann, see Kelly (2011); for work in progress on matters of formal and material axiology see at least Mulligan (1998, 2009), Tappolet (2000, 2011), Drummond (1995), Drummond and Embree (2002), Caminada and Summa (2015), Rinofner-Kreidl (2015) and De Monticelli (2015).

superiority of the individual over the collective, or the moral autonomy of individuals, and so on. They were "discovered" because they had been unknown for a long time and are far from being universally recognized even now; yet we would claim that their truth is epistemically universally accessible in principle. Phenomenological axiology is supposed to provide a new, bottom-up, experience-driven cognitivist and realistic conceptual frame supporting that claim.

The objectivity and independence of values is the first feature of ideality. The mutual consistency of values, made up of webs and rankings, is the second feature of ideality. Truth aptness of value statements depends on both features holding. Together—if we were ever able to bring them together in a clear way—they would translate the wisdom of the hedgehog into a general theory of values.

6 What Are Values? Toward a Phenomenological Axiology. The First Thesis: The Difference between Goods and Values

But what are values?

For now, we have taken a necessary first step by distinguishing between goods and values. *The difference between goods and values is the first thesis of phenomenological axiology*. It makes explicit an aspect of ideality that, if missing, would give the skeptic immediate victory.

First of all, this distinction is indispensable for clarity. The confusion between goods and values is pervasive in current everyday language. Some politicians say, for example, that the family is a value. But this is not true: if anything, the family is a good, especially insofar as it exemplifies or promotes certain positive values. Such politicians should then be expected to specify which of these they have in mind. Let us suppose they are thinking of values like fidelity in conjugal relationships, mutual trust among family members, and the solidarity of each member with the others—values that characterize behaviors and good relations among people and set norms. A family that realized these values would be a good family,

but its goodness, like that of any good, would be comparative: better than a family where instead of being supportive, each member acts egotistically, but certainly worse than one that puts fairness towards others outside the family before internal solidarity—thus demonstrating impartiality, an aspect of justice, and not producing nepotism, amoral familism, nor hindering growth of personal responsibility, etc. A family that, instead, gave rise to these evils would positively be an evil.

Second, the distinction between goods and values responds to that which was also Kant's most significant concern: preventing the variability, the particularity, the contingency of the goods that motivate human actions from also affecting the will for good, or the goodwill if one defines it as the will to realize determinate goods and thus binds it to them. Examples of contingently motivating goods might be the growth of a nation; or a particular embodiment of public justice in given institutions. For example, the Jacobins' Comité du Salut Publique was certainly a severely inadequate incarnation of justice. As happens so frequently and so tragically, the good that embodies a value (in an always partial, historically relative, and insufficient way) did not get distinguished from the value itself and its absoluteness: hence, the Terror ensued. Think of an analogous example with socialist values and what happened to those values in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union.

What about today? We talk a lot, in Europe, about the "dictatorship of the present" or the absence of long-sighted projects for public policy. Politics, we often assert, should be the "discourse about the ends." True, but the ends—here, too, Kant was right—are not at all what makes the will of their proponents good; if anything, it is *the values underlying those ends*. The confusion between the two has too often ended up entrusting people's wills to the ends that were supposed to emerge from history, just as Hegel (and Benedetto Croce in Italy) wanted: but hasn't historicism been proved to be one intellectual background of the bankruptcy of practical reason in the twentieth century?[28] Unfortunately, as far as the confusion of "historical" ends and values is concerned, things are not much better with Marx or, in Italy, Antonio Gramsci.

[28] See Popper (1994 [1957]). See also Chaps. 3 and 4 in this book.

The crucial task for political thought lies in identifying which values in which order of priority constitute the *ideal framework* of a possible course of action for realizing the finite and relative goods that, at least in part, would embody those values. Without such a framework, we usually contend with each other—and it is by no means unusual for this to lead to violence—over the goods already available in reality. In this perspective, political realism appears as a kind of value blindness that reduces politics to a fight over already given, contestable goods.

The confusion between goods and values allows for moral reasons to be given *a posteriori* and in a contingent manner: a good is what motivates us and motivates us as long as it exists or as long as it can be obtained. Giving in to the temptations of realpolitik is inevitable for one who acts with a view towards determinate goods rather than their corresponding values. As Max Scheler put it:

> Any alteration in this realm of goods would be accompanied by a change in the sense and meaning of good and evil […] Thus all ethics would be based on historical experience, which reveals changes in this realm of goods; and hence ethics could have only empirical and inductive validity.[29]

7 Eidetics as Experimental Phenomenology: The Second Thesis

How can values be given to experience and still have their ideality safeguarded? This is the phenomenological version of the Dilemma of Metaethics: we can call it the Paradox of Axiology. Metaethics, in its top-down approach, bypasses the phenomenon of value experience. On the other hand, modern skepticism about practical reason is rooted in this unsolved paradox. By contrast, phenomenology was essentially born

[29] Scheler (1973a, pp. 9–10). This passage reminds us of another one, written about 70 years later by Bernard Williams: "It is an obvious enough idea that if we are going to understand how ethical concepts work, and how they change, we have to have some insight into the forms of social organization within which they work. The linguistic approach does not, at some detached level, deny this […] But it is at least potentially closer to some understanding of the social and historical dimensions of ethical thought than some other approaches, which see it entirely in terms of an autonomous and unchanging subject matter." Williams (1985, p. 131).

from the originality and depth of the philosophical move required to solve this paradox. Or so I will argue.

The required move can be described as a claim that may sound, to our ears, conditioned by the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition, like a pure oxymoron: values are non-empirical data, or "material *a priori*." For those steeped in this tradition, if something is *a priori* it is formal and non-material, that is, it is a Kantian form of the intuition, or a category, a validation procedure and not a datum or a given content; if it is a datum or a given content, it is *a posteriori* and not *a priori*.

We will not take this step forward without applying our methodological rule: the nature of a thing can only be accessed in the actual or, at least, in the imagined presence of the thing itself. It is impossible to speculate about values without the presence of the goods and ills that exemplify them.

One does not have to go out into the world for very long to accumulate a massive amount of axiological data. Tired of deciphering obscure theories, I raise my eyes and am struck by the harmonious shape of the white soup tureen on the table; I step onto the balcony and breathe in the pleasing scent of my roses; in the distance, I can make out the majestic contours of the Alps. Then I go outside, and walking gives me a sense of renewed well-being; a group of girls passes by, some smart and graceful, others wearing vulgar outfits. At the news-stand, the newspaper headlines and images cry out violence, injustice, fraud. An older boy is mercilessly teasing a smaller one, who is on the verge of tears—a cruel game. I go into the house of a new acquaintance: I am struck by the sober elegance of the furnishings of her living room.

Let us consider this last fact. Right away, we again find the strange behavior of normative properties, always obstinately the same, the behavior that so troubled Hume and Moore and still, today, upsets contemporary metaethicists. There is absolutely nothing that an elegantly furnished room, an elegant outfit, an elegant way of walking, or even a mathematical demonstration have in common, if not the elegance value. These three or four goods might not have even one "real" property in common.

Nevertheless, just as elegance itself is striking, unmistakable, and emanates from different things like a kind of non-visible glow, something about it is retained, unchanging, and intuitively accessible: some given

content, invariant across variations in imagination—yet recognizable across epochs, societies, civilizations, and cultures. An eidetic invariant is given.

Undoubtedly elegant furnishings from ancient Rome would have had very little in common with those of the Chinese empire of the seventeenth century or those of a Frank Lloyd Wright house. Yet, we can understand Ovid or a Chinese novel (say, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) or a Henry James novel if they use or somehow imply this word, elegance. What remains unchanged across a great variety of environments, furnishings, and materials is a kind of decorum and restraint, a harmony, a lack of excess and ostentation, a coherence not exempt of grace, that we tend to associate with the concept of elegance. This concept will seem either appropriate or not according to whether or not the room seen, evoked, or imagined exhibits certain characteristic constants, regardless of how differently they may be "realized."

Now, if we derived from these impressions a miniature eidetics of elegance,[30] in what sense would we have come up with a "non-empirical" datum or a "material *a priori*"?

Certainly not in the sense that experience was not required: it was as required as the exercise of a sensibility that no doubt involves both sense perception and emotional feeling, and that can be even more effective if accompanied by some minimal expertise in graphic arts, sketching, drawing, and design. Rather, we are in the presence of a non-empirical datum in the sense that the evidence for the axiological theses, in their generality, does not lie in empirical induction. If we are ready to use the term "experimental" in a sense that does not involve empirical induction, we can talk of experimental eidetic or "experimental phenomenology."[31]

Phenomenology, indeed, had its experimental beginnings in the laboratory run by Carl Stumpf: a former student of Brentano and the last master of Husserl in Halle, where the latter discovered the material *a priori* structures of perception, that the three other most famous students

[30] Such a thing does already exist: see chapter 18, "Elegance," in Hildebrand (2016). Japanese philosopher Kuki Shuzo devoted an entire treatise to this value in *The Structure of Iki* (2004 [1930]); private communication, Alessandro Salice. More recently, see Simionescu-Panait (2021).

[31] Bozzi (2018) and Albertazzi (2013); cf. the origin of this promising branch of psychology of perception in Carl Stumpf's Laboratory in Halle, attended by Husserl in the 1890s.

of Stumpf—Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka—made famous under the name of Gestalt Laws. Their unifying principle states "that structured wholes or *Gestalten*, rather than sensations, are the primary units of mental life. This was the key idea of the new and revolutionary Gestalt theory, developed by Wertheimer and his colleagues in Berlin,"[32] but largely anticipated by Husserl's phenomenology of the "figural moments," that is the structural properties unifying percepts into wholes (and responsible for the best known Gestalt laws: figure-ground organization, groupings by proximity, similarity, direction, common fate, good continuation, etc.).[33]

The motto of phenomenology, "back to the things themselves," expresses a fundamental principle of phenomenology, i.e., the principle of priority of the given over conceptual construction. Of course, there is nothing uniquely phenomenological about that principle by itself. It is a typical principle of empiricism. However, what phenomenology rejects about empiricism is, to put it in Köhler's words, the idea that the given—the phenomenal world—is "an indifferent mosaic" or "an indifferent continuum." In short, to put the point positively, the given has form, structure, and organization as such. What experimental phenomenology discovered is that a kind of normativity permeates the perceptual world.[34] Colors and values found their place in the lifeworld based on a new classification that experimental phenomenology provided of all the qualities rejected as "subjective" and "secondary" by the founders of modern physics. Besides the old secondary qualities, rebaptized "qualities of filling" (like colors and sounds), they recognized figural qualities or Gestalten, structuring the filling contents into wholes. Gestalt wholes suggested a paradigm of structured wholes to Husserl, allowing him to lay the foundations of his Theory of Wholes and Parts (Third Logical Investigation). Husserl's notion of unitary foundation, describing the structure of a whole, will be our key to the solution of the Dilemma of Metaethics, or the Paradox of Axiology (see Sect. 8).

[32] Wagemans et al. (2012, p. 3).

[33] Ibid., p. 8.

[34] "The most general principle was the so-called law of Prägnanz, stating, in its most general sense, that the perceptual field and objects within it will take on the simplest and most encompassing ('ausgezeichnet') structure permitted by the given conditions." Ibid., p. 5.

Now, as soon as the lifeworld is displayed in front of the psychologist (Koffka calls it "the molar world" of our actions, as opposed to "the molecular world" of traditional atomistic psychology),[35] its space appears to be one's surrounding space, with "origin" in the "zero-point of coordinates of the orientation space" of any one of us.[36] It is a space organized by the "natural axes system," a non-isotropic space with its "directions of sense," its "lines of force" determined by gravity, upright posture and the bodily scheme, the direction of locomotion, and the physical constraints induced by our motor organization on movement or action. In such a space, places essentially differ in "affordability" and show a visual value hierarchy between what is "higher" and what is "lower," the sky and the earth, and what is placed in-between.[37] Objects in this space are not only more or less manipulable according to their physical properties but are meaningful as well. They have functional properties or affordances[38] as chairs serving to sit on and canvas serving to make pictures. Eidetic phenomenology generalizes experimental phenomenology findings: a generalization from ordinary perceptual objects to all sorts of intuitively given ones, including ideal objects (or "varieties," such as mathematical ones). To be "given" in any modality of intuitive presence—be it sensory perception, emotion, empathy, logical or mathematical, i.e. "structural" intuition—is to be given as a structured, internally differentiated, organized whole or part thereof.

Let us consider a few cases supporting this generalization.

The simplest nuance of blue cannot appear but against a differently colored background. A blue sky cannot appear as a blue totality except in a shaped extension—the celestial vault, for example. A simple tone must have a pitch, a duration, a volume, and a timbre. A type letter must preserve its articulated shape despite its countless variant tokens. Even an elementary logical truth, as in the simple formula $\neg(p \& \neg p)$ shows the required articulation of "dependent" ($\neg$, &) and "independent" meanings (p).

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[35] Koffka (1935, ch. 2).

[36] Husserl, *Ideas* II, § 41a.

[37] Straus (1966) and Binswanger (1963).

[38] On the history of this term introduced by Gibson as a rendering of the German term *Aufforderung*, and related terms, see Sect. 9.

As the type letter, the logical form, and even a simple chair, show clearly, this world is stuffed with a third type of non-primary quality, charged with normativity. Experimental phenomenologists called them "tertiary qualities" or "qualities of demand":[39] they include aesthetic qualities, affordances, and many more value qualities. Any of these objects is a more or less *good* exemplar of its type: salience of the relevant features for the type letter, simplicity for the formula, comfortableness for the armchair. They voice across the lifeworld what Wolfgang Köhler called "requiredness" (see the epigraph to this chapter). The most telling example of such a requiredness is being off-key when singing a melody.

Let us go back to our hypothetical eidetic of elegance. Elegance is a tertiary quality, inseparable from the structured whole it pertains to, be it a gait, a way of dressing, a living room, or a behavior. It is not a functional value, as are most affordances that are so evident in our human-made artifacts: the "grasp-ability" of a handle, the "sit-ability" of seats, but also the oppressive quality of a ceiling that is too low for the size of the room, the heaviness of pillars disproportionate in diameter relative to height, the cramped space of a pub with walls that are too close together. Elegance has more of an aesthetical value, and yet it can even express new ideals about women and freedom, like the revolutions in fashion produced by an artist like Coco Chanel.

Whatever axiological theses on elegance we could put forward in our mini-eidetic, they would be surely based on experience, but not on an empirical-inductive use of experience. Their generality would not be reached by gathering data from a third-person perspective (such as reports or quantified data) and statistical generalization, but rather by taking instances of elegant things as types and applying eidetic variation to them. This is an eidetic-exemplary use of experience that is accessible from a first-person perspective (to anyone). Ours, then, would be descriptive theses whose verification would be in their own *exempla* (until proven otherwise: of course, they would open up possible pathways for a more in-depth and broader analysis of their exemplary bases). For there is no doubt that each new encounter, each new example, allows us to discover new data and relationships: as in every cognitive exploration, here there

[39] Albertazzi (2013, p. 280).

is also an aspect of adventure—like the one Merleau-Ponty (2012) taught us to see in the realm of perception. Every new good, then, will exhibit new aspects of the same value: every beautiful thing will exemplify different aspects of beauty and different relationships with other values[40]—gracefulness, or vigor, or simplicity.

Our research method for the eidos of elegance would be different from the (empirical) methods of the social sciences in the same way that the experimental phenomenology of Gestalt psychologists differs from the empirical psychology of neuroscientists. The Gestalt laws of perception are not grounded on a statistical basis but on typical objects of visual experiences, accessible to anyone in the first person; each class exemplifies a typical law, whose generality is essential or eidetic, and not empirical or inductive.[41]

This may be enough for the second thesis of phenomenological axiology: values are a subclass of *eide*, or material *a priori properties*.

8 Where Are Values Located? Third and Fourth Theses

Values are a subclass of material *a priori properties*: but which one? To answer this question, we must at least touch on the way a phenomenologist would settle the tangled issue of supervenience.[42]

Axiological statements (statements about values and the reciprocal relationships between them), if true, are necessarily true—that is, true in all the possible worlds in which the goods that embody those values exist (to a greater or lesser extent: therefore, in some of these worlds there will be, for example, much more that remains to be realized regarding justice as a political value, compared to other worlds: more equality of dignity, more responsible freedom, etc.). Now, we can quite easily conceive of a world where people—let us say, Martians—are very different from us as

[40] Merleau-Ponty (1992, p. 190).

[41] This difference can be expressed in model terms: the Gestalt laws of vision, for instance, are validated in any *visible* possible world; whereas we can conceive of worlds in which the physiology of vision is different from our actual one.

[42] Sturgeon (2007), Blackburn (2008 [1985]) and Dreier (2008).

far as all aspects of their "natural" characteristics are concerned, and yet they dispose of goods like (more or less) just republics. If calling axiological properties "supervenient" implies that value properties are reducible to natural properties as their bases, then supervenience is not the right concept to explain the relations between things and values. Similar goods may have entirely different natural bases.

Classical phenomenology provides us with a concept that gives an account of the relations between values and goods much more adequately than the concept of supervenience, for it "saves" the phenomenon it describes instead of explaining it away. I mean the concept of *unitary foundation*, the key concept of Husserl's theory of parts and wholes, which he developed in his *Logical Investigations* precisely in order to clarify his bold generalization of the principle of Gestalt—or richness and internal organization of contents—to anything given to intuitive cognition, including eidetic and axiological intuition.[43]

Since we cannot expound this theory in detail, let us point to its chief merit relative to the notion of supervenience, exploiting the example above. Whereas the relation of supervenience defines an asymmetrical relation of ontological dependence of the supervenient properties on the subvenient bases, the relation of *unitary* foundation defines a bilateral ontological dependence between a containing whole and its contents or "parts," such that the whole can be preserved independently of its particular contents, although not independently of some contents of that *kind*.[44] Think of a melody, which is recognizably the same even when "transposed" an octave higher. Suppose it is a charming melody. Then, neither its Gestalt quality—its structure—nor its value quality—its charm—is altered by changing the particular sounds composing it (within certain constraints). On the contrary, the individual sounds are modified by entering the melody: they acquire properties dependent on (their position in) the whole (being a dominant or a tonic note). But what if the

[43] For a detailed introduction to classic formal mereology, see Simons (1987), more recently Cotnoir and Varzi (2021). About the mereological notions in the history of philosophy see Mulligan and Smith (1982). For a more systematic reconstruction of Husserl's specific approach to formal mereology, see De Monticelli (2013, 2020c) and Rinofner-Kreidl (2015).

[44] For more details see De Monticelli (2013).

melody itself changes? It can either preserve or lose its charm, depending on the structural changes that occur.

This remark suggests a third axiological thesis: *a value is a global quality of a good that realizes that value*. To understand the concept of global quality, we must recall the Gestalt theory of non-primary qualities. Tertiary qualities—that is, values—do not inhere in perceivable things as partial contents or as Husserlian "moments" of them, but rather as qualities of those Gestalten that in their turn give secondary qualities structure, holding them together in a whole. For example, the elegance of a bowl does not inhere in the bowl as its blue color does. The blue inheres "in" the bowl as an inseparable "part" or an aspect of it. The whole—the bowl—has a color, a shape, a material of which it is made, etc. Elegance "qualifies" the bowl instead as something of which each component of the whole partakes. Elegance is, in Platonic language, "participated" by the bowl. Consequently, values are higher-order qualities, in the sense of being qualities of structured wholes. In the intuitive terminology of Gestalt theory, they dictate the terms on which wholes "live on" and preserve "good form"—or do not.

Max Scheler had something of this kind in mind when he denied that goods are simply things happening to possess a value:

> For, according to the essence of a good, its value does not appear to be situated on a thing; on the contrary, goods are thoroughly permeated by values. The unity of a value guides the synthesis of all other qualities of a good.[45]

This is the third thesis of phenomenological axiology. Another intuitive example is my friend's elegant living room. Yet another, more significant one, is a just republic. To the extent that it really is just, such a real good thing emanates justice, so to speak, from every aspect of its functioning, from all its citizens' behaviors or at least from every response to unjust behaviors. Maybe this does "justice" to the much-reviled "harmony" of Plato's ideal city, which indeed becomes a totalitarian nightmare if, as Plato had done, one does not see the inexhaustible web of ideality contained in the value justice, and confuses the ideal city with a

[45] Scheler (1973, p. 22).

partial realization of it: neglecting, for example, liberty and the equal dignity of roles.

First of all, this thesis tells us where values are located. Not in the Platonic sky, despite their objectivity, independent of existing goods. This objectivity is “independent” of existing goods (and evils) because it is constitutive of them: existing goods depend on the values they embody in this sense, that they are “constituted by the unity of a value quality,” to use Scheler’s formula: “The unity of a value guides the synthesis of all other qualities of a good.”[46] “Unity” here is a term for unitary foundation; it implicitly refers to Husserl’s theory of wholes and parts by hinting at that which “holds together” or “contains” all the contents in a whole. Ultimately, the components of a republic are citizens, that is, rational and moral agents. So, there is a constraint on possible variations of bio-physio-psychological features of these last components in order for them to be rational agents (there cannot be republics of horses unless horses are reasonable beings, and this is an eidetic truth). But since citizens and moral agents are what they are independently of whether they are Martians or humans, so republics are what they are independently of the habits and the economic and social institutions of their citizens, which can vary a great deal, albeit within certain limits, which it would be the task of a full-fledged social ontology to articulate. Given all these structural invariants allowing for indefinite (but not unlimited) variations, it is easy to see that the justice of republics (these *Gestalten* or structured wholes, exemplifying a type of unitary foundation) does not depend on the (particular) materials of which they are made, even if they could not exist without materials.

There are, of course, also (partial) exemplifications of disvalues: vulgar melodies and unjust republics. Ills and evils seem to disrupt the unity of value, exemplifying the loss of global qualities of structure or the unfitness of partial contents. With this, we can correct another Platonic mistake: It is not true that the dirty or the ugly do not have an Idea and therefore do not have being, that evil reduces to nonbeing. Dirty deals, ugly actions do exist. Bad gestalten too, as well as good gestalten.

[46] Ibid., p. 20.

The fourth thesis of phenomenological axiology is, indeed, common to the whole of eidetic phenomenology: it is *the thesis of the inseparability of facts and essences—in particular, of goods and values*.

The third and fourth theses clarify each other in turn. What does it mean to say that values are, first of all, qualities? Hume and Moore, and countless other authors today, have recognized the analogy between values and colors, the "secondary qualities." A quality, unlike a property captured by a sortal concept (like the concept of man), provides no criteria for its application: when analyzing the predicate "is a man," I can always say to which creatures this predicate applies (bipedal animals, which are featherless, reasonable, or carrying our DNA); but I cannot do the same when analyzing the predicate "is yellow" or "is beautiful." Hume, Moore, and almost all the others, however, stop here, showing no interest in the difference between "secondary" and "tertiary" qualities. However, as we have seen, there is a big difference between an aspect or partial content of a thing, localized on it, like the blue color of this vase, and something that "permeates" the entire vase, such as its elegance, constituted by its proportions, shape, color, and, above all, the way all these qualities "meld together," modifying each other in turn—giving rise to a particular gleam, a gracefulness without ostentation. To sum up, the global quality we call elegance.

The supervenience concept seems inadequate to the phenomena also from the point of view of this fourth axiological claim. In some versions of it, supervenience expresses a nonreductive ontological dependency between the supervenient and the subvenient.[47] But where is the place it makes for values in a world of facts? Where does it locate values? After all, we do find them in the things, facts, events, situations, actions of the real world, and nowhere else.

To think clearly about how values inhabit facts, we must definitively abandon the metalinguistic language of metaethics. We have seen that

[47] "There is nothing to a case of generosity, or viciousness, or dutiful action, other than the natural features that constitute such properties. Something exemplifies a moral property entirely in virtue of its possessing certain natural features. Non-naturalists, as well as classical naturalists, can endorse this picture […] The difference between the non-naturalist and the reductive naturalist, on this view, is a modal one. Non-naturalists can, and reductionists can't, allow for the possibility of a moral property's exemplification by means of some natural property other than the one whose instantiation, at a time, has in fact subserved it" (Shafer-Landau 2003, pp. 75–76).

well before they become properties in the sense of references to linguistic predicates, values are present to us in their intuitive immediacy as qualities detectable by our sensory and emotive sensibilities. An immediacy that is not the same as instantaneousness: it actually takes much time and much patient attention to become aware of the qualitative distinctions' subtleties.

Again, to see how values reside in goods even though normative properties are not reducible to "real" properties, we must ask ourselves how we are supposed to understand the preposition "in." Is the elegance of a stride, for example, like a component (a "part") of a stride? Isn't it, rather, more like something that the entire body's movements and posture "participate" in? The second reading seems more plausible. In both cases, at stake is a relationship between a whole and its parts, but the relationships are different in each case. An elegant stride for example "contains" (in the Latin sense of *contineo* = *cum* together + *tenere* to hold) the movements of which it is composed in the sense that it "holds" them "together" in a certain way, according to certain dynamic and rhythmic proportions. Undoubtedly, the elegance of a stride depends on how its constituent movements, the "parts," hold together: and it cannot be in just any kind of way. Once more, a gait is not just a sum of single movements, but an organized dynamic whole, a Gestalt—and an elegant gait places even stricter constraints on this Gestalt. Elegance is a positive quality of it. (A nice visual experiment on "living" or biological movement, devised by Niko Troje (now at York University, Canada) through an animation displaying a continuous series of walking dynamic gestalten, is easily found on the web (BioMotionLab).) Different walking styles express strikingly identifiable axiological and psychological qualities, as one can easily verify.

The fourth thesis, more generally, concerns the entire domain of eidetic phenomenology. Let us then give some examples of it, starting from the simplest things.

Let us take the letter A: in a sense, we can say that its shape "holds together" the points that make it up. The letter A is an ideal type; one can write it in an endless number of ways—you will end up with as many tokens, more or less legible, of the type. The relationship between type and token is described by the thesis of the inseparability of essence and fact. The type indeed is not located anywhere else than in the more or less good tokens of it. However, it is "in" each token not as one stroke of the A, but as its

Gestalt—its physiognomy: no "separable" piece or part, but the look of A, without which the A is no longer an A. The type is a bond that holds its parts together, or a constraint on their possible variations (of shape and size), a limit beyond which there is no longer an A, but a meaningless scribble. Therefore, the type is located in the token as in the unity of "containment" of the contents—the unity that makes a whole of an aggregate of graphemes.

A whole, we say, is more than the sum of its parts. The theory of sums is classical mereology; the theory of parts and wholes was first proposed by Stanisław Leśniewski in 1916, reformulated by Leonard and Goodman in 1940, and completed by Lewis in 1991.[48] Take (S) as an informal characterization of a sum in the intuitive mereological sense of the world:

(I) SUM $=_{df}$ Any plurality reducible to its elements or parts, being ontologically innocent with respect to them.

The more formal definition of a mereological sum is as follows:

(F) SUM $=_{df}$: u is a sum of $x_1 \ldots x_n =_{def}$ for all y, y overlaps u iff y overlaps at least one of the *xs*

Intuitively, the idea is that to be contained in a sum is to be contained in at least one of its contained entities, or, as it is more common to say, to be part of a sum is to be part of at least one of its parts. Husserl has an equivalent "theorem" in § 14 of the Third Logical Investigation. (Theorem 3, in its simple formulation, reads: "An independent part of an independent part is an independent part of a whole.")

So described, a sum is the loosest possible way for several things to compose a plurality. It is one of two ways of being together, as identified by Plato's discussion of the problem of the one and the many in *Theaetetus* (202e-205e). Recall: given two elements, the question is, how are we to conceive of the whole of which the two elements are parts? According to one proposal, that whole must be conceived as all of its parts, an aggregate somehow identical to them. Another suggestion, which Plato seems to prefer, makes the whole out to be distinct from its parts and, in a sense, a new, further individual thing.

[48] Leśniewski (1916, 1992), Leonard and Goodman (1940), Lewis (1991). A presentation of its basic tenets is available in all the best textbooks of analytic metaphysics. See, for example, Cotnoir and Varzi (2021). For an intuitive discussion of some of its principles from a phenomenological point of view, see De Monticelli (2021, forthcoming).

He seems to be right in the particular case discussed, since the word "me" appears to be a new thing, or a thing of a new type, one ontologically not innocent or reducible to the mere sum of "m" and "e."

Based on these notions, the dictum that a whole is "more" than a sum can be rephrased as follows: if a *sum* is a collection defined by classical mereology (a collection without mortar that holds it together, like sand), so there are *wholes* that are not mere sums: that is, they have a unitary foundation, making them something new, new individuals, over and above their parts. A heap of apples is not a mere sum—for it has a form of unity (contiguity) preventing the heap to survive the scattering of the apples (as a sum would do). Any word whatsoever is more than the collection of letters or phonemes that make it up, as we can see by changing their order. A melody can even remain the same despite all its part changed, simply by being transposed an octave higher. Something analogous happens when a proposition is translated into another language.

With the Gestalt theorists and Husserl, we can conceive any concrete object as a unitary whole. The essence of a concrete thing is the unity of its contents. It is the constraint on their possible (co)variations that sets a limit beyond which that specific thing loses its identity—it is no longer a thing of that type.

As the hedgehog knows, without knowing how to express it, "what is not one being is no longer actually a being."[49]

What are these essences that, quite intelligibly, we are afraid of because we do not know where to put them? At the same time, we are already beginning to hear the snickers of the scientist looking at us as if we were followers of a Simplicius of some kind, a metaphysician of old, arriving late on the scene and still trying to contradict Galileo with his scholastic chimeras.[50] What is this kind of equivalence between Being and One? What kind of crazy metaphysical speculation is this? How is it that essences can be inside things?

However, this is not idle speculation. An essence is nothing but a constraint or a collection of constraints on the possible variations of any

[49] Leibniz (2016).

[50] The reference is to the *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* of 1632 (Galilei 2001), in which Simplicius is the conservative supporter of the Ptolemaic System against the Copernican one.

concrete thing's contents. To a certain extent, every concrete thing is differentiated or "rich" in contents. A sound has a register, a pitch, a duration, a volume. You can change all of them at will: but if you eliminate any one of these dimensions, the sound as such will no longer exist. Such is its essence: this unity of contents, given in the thing itself. It is a property necessary to a sound, as one could say, *de re*. This means that what we call a sound on this earth will have these properties in every possible world in which it exists. It is not simply a *de dicto* necessity coming out of the analysis of linguistic meaning. We can continue with examples across the entire unending realm of the concrete. A chair has a function, a shape, and is made up of certain materials. A teacher has a role and corresponding powers and duties. The exercise of this role requires the mastery of a language. We can imagine a world where horses teach French literature, but then they must know French. These are all essential constraints, and once violated, a thing ceases to exist as that type of thing. The essence of a thing is the bond of (co)variation that contains them or keeps them together.

9 The Gift of Bonds: Eidetics and Axiology—The Fifth Thesis

We can call this the discovery of the gift of bonds. Constraints (on possible variation) are given; we are not the ones who impose them on things. But beware: if constraints are given, then each real thing "asks" to be one way and not another (and to be recognized as such) through what appears. Every concrete thing contains an ideal "ought-to-be." A chair can vary wildly in form and materials, but it cannot ignore the constraints on "sitability" without ceasing to be a chair. At a certain point, moreover, it will cease to be a *good* chair. Every real thing is a source of norms of some sort. It features some sort of "requiredness."

A note on this term: it was chosen by the Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler as a strict English rendering of the German term *Forderung* (or of its close semantic relative, *Aufforderung*), which certain prominent German expatriates translated each in his own way: Herbert Spiegelberg, for instance, opted for the term "claim," and J. J. Gibson, famously,

coined the neologism "affordance" for it.[51] However it is translated, the idea is meant to capture the phenomenon of being struck, in the middle of a world of facts, by something "required." A state of affairs "asking" to be put in order or tidied up somehow, "claiming" something due (e.g., the right tone at the end of a melody), or just "inviting" you to behave in some way, in the way that armchairs invite you to rest and high mountains demand silence. Requiredness, in its multifarious forms, is ubiquitous in the lifeworld. This is the central thesis in Köhler' book *The Place of Values in a World of Facts*, written during his American exile in the same year of the German Kristallnacht, the pogrom throughout Nazi Germany and parts of Austria, the real beginning of the "Final Solution."[52]

A democratic republic is a collection of constraints on the exercise of power that certainly is not limited to political power: it extends to the exercise of power in all of its forms and, more generally, to all aspects of life in a community. In the previous chapters, we looked at just some of these aspects.

The third and fourth theses, taken together, help to clarify the second one. To which subclass of essences (*eide*, material *a priori*) do values belong?

As we saw above, the essence of a (concrete) thing is the comprising unity of its contents, imposing constraints on their possible (co)variations, the violation of which amounts to a loss of the specific identity of that thing. By analogy, we may suppose that the same relation holds between a value and a good actualizing it.

In order to verify this hypothesis, let us take a familiar value like friendship. There is no doubt that friendship is only to be found in the friends' behavior—and in all such behaviors: one cannot be a friend one day and an enemy the next. The good that *this* friendship of ours represents can well be seen as a whole: it has a temporal extension, a history, which includes all of your gestures and attitudes towards me—and each one of these is, in effect, a "moment" of this friendship. What makes such

[51] Cf. Gibson (1986) and Bozzi (2018).

[52] Köhler (1966 [1938]). Köhler had actually left Germany by that time, having departed in 1935. Incidentally, 1938 is the year of Edmund Husserl's death. During the last three years of his life, Husserl wrote all the material that would later become the most famous of his books after the *Logical Investigations*, namely, *The Crisis of European Sciences*.

behaviors friendly, if not such constraints as loyalty, fidelity, sincerity, and frankness—beyond which such behaviors will cease to be friendly? Yet—and here we see the characteristic transcendence of a value over and above the good that embodies it—what friendship requires is not fixed as a set of recognizable, conventional norms. The ideal requirements imposed by friendship as a value are definite but infinite. Friendship transcends every given manifestation. Behaviors that would surprise us, that bring out as-yet unimagined aspects of friendship, are always possible.

This shows the "global nature" that a value shares with every "real" essence. But the specific difference is that a value is a quality. Earlier, we explored the difference between a "qualitative" and a "sortal" ideal type: the first in no way delimits the class of exemplars that belong to it—while the second does. We can now better focus on the significant consequences of this difference by returning to our point of departure, looking at one of the most widespread evils in the social lifeworld—corruption.

Corruptissima respublica plurimae leges. Tacitus' terse observation provides the perfect picture of a corrupted society: the most significant is the number of laws, the greatest is the number of illegal activities. The broad meaning of the term "corruption" includes corruption of the entire body of laws and the legislative system—but, in a more general sense, it includes that of a given normative system, say, for example, language. When considering the meaning of a term for a property, we should learn to distinguish the property's empirical aspect referred to from the eidetic and axiological aspects. The eidetic aspect delimits which domain of reality an empirical science will section off for itself, dealing with the relationships and properties pertaining to that branch of science, considering them separately from other relationships and properties. Now, the sense in which we primarily use the term "corruption" clearly suggests acts that take place inside the social sphere of reality. Economic science will section off the part that concerns transactions or mutually beneficial trade—representing one dimension of corruptive relationships—and will tell us what form these relationships take. Ideal or value-centered analysis, on the other hand, tells us what kind of quality corruption is.

Philosophers would be left with plenty to do even if they were only concerned with the second aspect of the problem, leaving the first to the social scientists. Let us clarify this distinction by focusing on the sense in

which the research of the social scientist is "factual" and not "evaluative." The phenomenon of corruption can be analyzed using a theoretical framework that considers its structure as a kind of triangle—Harlequin, the servant of two masters, where the real master (the principal) is harmed by a secret agreement of the servant (the corrupt agent) with another master (the corruptor or the client). The most reviled case from the citizen's point of view is where she herself is the principal, that is, the public interest, and the servant of two masters is the public official.[53]

However, there is no need for the social scientist to suppress the term "corruption," or to regard the disvalue-laden fact of corruption as if it were "neutral." This false but very popular reading of Max Weber's claim about the value-neutrality of the social sciences, rightly criticized from inside sociology (Heinich 2019), only depends on the confusion between value judgements and what we called axiological statements (see above, Sect. 5 of Chap. 6). This said, it seems as if there may be nothing more left for the philosopher to discover on corruption. But this is not the case: on the ideal plane, there is still very much to be investigated. Corruption is a disvalue: therefore, a specific negative global quality. Of what? Of every living whole. Here, the etymology of the term "corruption" can come to our aid because common language usage reflects the world's qualitative aspect much more than we realize. Every adjective expresses a quality, and most qualities can be felt—either by sense perception or by emotional sensitivity, or both.

Corrupt, from the Latin *corrumpere*, means the opposite of integrity (*corruptio/integritas*): *corrumpo* literally means "break into many parts," *disintegrate*, dissolve, destroy, dissipate.

The basic intuitive and perceptible idea is precisely that of the living whole's disintegration, signifying its death: degradation of its state, loss of order and complexity—therefore of harmony. Order, in Greek, is *kosmos*—and if we have words like cosmetics that involve aesthetics or even the beautician's art, it is precisely because a fundamental layer of beauty involves order, harmony, regularity, or conformity to some law. The Greek insight goes further and can tie both justice and beauty into only one idea: the cosmos's splendor is the visible manifestation of cosmic order.

[53] Vannucci (2012, pp. 124–125) and Della Porta and Vannucci (2007).

One must see the death throes of a pine forest by the sea—with coastal erosion eating away at it, and the *disruption*, the ghostly disorder of dying pines—to be able to understand what "corruption" means in an axiological sense. As in the case of one of the most beautiful Italian nature reserves abandoned to the disintegrating power of coastal water flows—its natural order, in turn, upset through the violent act of paving over the landscape to make room for private real estate speculation, in the middle of a national park, in the public interest.[54]

Let us summarize. We should not abandon a natural park to corruption. We should not abandon a coastal pine grove to *disruption*, *tout court*. There is something scandalous in the death throes of a pine grove once you see it. In this way, the everyday world is full of "eidetic" and axiological requirements and implicit directives for all of our perceiving, feeling, and doing. Its infinite richness everywhere encompasses order, structure, norms. This thought can be found throughout Husserl's work from his *Logical Investigations* to *The Crisis of European Sciences*.

To conclude, we can formulate a general eidetic thesis that we will call *the given's normative resource principle*.[55] This shows us how, in the presence of the right kind of "is"—namely the "is" of descriptive statements about ideal types and values, as encountered in the everyday world—we can easily derive the "ought" that Hume wanted to ban from the realm of rational and cognitive justification. Here I will adopt a social phenomenologist's recent formulation of this principle:

> From the phenomenological perspective […] the existence of every entity is intrinsically normative in the following sense: to exist as a "thing" of a certain type—such as a sound, a person, a promise, an action, a soldier, etc.—each entity must conform to the essential structure that defines its being.[56]

[54] What is hinted at here is the environmental and landscape disaster at the Cecina River's mouth (Livorno, Tuscany). For a photographic record of the disaster, caused by private speculation with the complicity of the local administration, see http://www.italiainsvendita.com/#!projects/c10d6.

[55] A more systematic explanation of this principle is available in De Monticelli (2020a).

[56] De Vecchi (2012, p. 16). For an analytic discussion of this principle, proposing an alternative way to Searle's method for deriving "Ought" from "Is", see De Monticelli 2020b.

Indeed, as we have seen, a chair will cease to be a good chair beyond a given limit of eidetic variation in the perpendicularity of seat and back—and further beyond, will cease to be a chair at all. Before losing its identity, the possible chair will lose its value, becoming very uncomfortable. Even the dying pine tree loses its qualities of vitality and vigor, its freshness, its scent, before losing—when no longer vertical—its existence as a coastal pine tree and becoming the skeleton of a pine tree, a mere heap of firewood. Maybe the relationship thing/good, on the one hand, and eidos/value, on the other hand, has now become more evident. Values are global qualities of goods. A value from a specific sphere—like beauty, functionality, or competence—is the global quality of a concrete exemplar of F (coastal pine trees, chairs, teachers) that makes it a good F—an ideal F.

Again, using *the principle of normative resource of the given* we can easily deduce an "ought" from an "is." For example, we can easily derive that "a democratic republic should not be governed through secret agreements" from "a democracy is the political regime of visible power."[57]

This principle is the fifth thesis of phenomenological axiology. It brings to mind the example of the "ideal coffee" that we started with, but above all, it reminds us of many "disfigured" democracies of our time.[58]

10 Axiology and Reasons for Action: Material Ethics

Let us return to our initial question: where does public evil come from?

Heading towards the end of this work, we may reconsider the answer I put forward in Chap. 2: civil apathy, or atrophy of value experience in the public sphere, as making up the phenomenology of what has been called the banality of evil. Now that we have a more definite notion of what values are, we should go deeper into the phenomenology of value experience, on the one hand, and of voluntary action based on axiological reasons, on the other hand.

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[57] Bobbio (1984a, p. 76).

[58] Urbinati (2014).

As we know, a reawakening of practical reason is not a question of exhortation or rhetoric—Socrates resolutely opposed all this. It is, above all, a question of cognition. It is up to us to help the small, slow, mute hedgehog—the hedgehog that walks inside us, attached to this earth—to stay alive before the foxes, wolves, and moths kill it. The only necessary condition for the reawakening of practical reason is for the hedgehog's wisdom to find air to breathe and words to speak in the first person.

What I mean is that it is only secondarily a matter of will. It is primarily a question of awareness, hence of feeling—the specific mode of value consciousness.

Moreover—and this opens up another discussion that must wait for another time—a suitable phenomenology of willing and deciding allows us to see that a will that lacks motivation is like a pair of legs without a person attached to them: an act of will, a decision, means precisely that consent is being given to a possible motive. Endorsing a possible motive makes it into an actual motive for action, even if the motive were to demonstrate the possibility of acting without a motive. In other words, an act of will is the unity of a motive and a position: these two components can vary endlessly (the position can change from hesitating, suspension, virtual alternation of yes and no, refusal, and this possible motive can be replaced by an array of alternatives)—but if you separate these two components, the act of will ceases to exist. This, in a nutshell, is Alexander Pfänder's phenomenological theory of the will—as the disposition whose acts are decisions (Pfaender 1967). Strangely enough, no very specific theory of the will has been worked out within the so called Classical Model of Practical Rationality, where the Belief-Desire theory of decisions dominated for a long time—until Searle (in 1983, 2001, 2004) and Bratman (in 1987, 2000) put it into question, by replacing it with the Belief-Desire-Intention theory. However, an intention is definitely not yet a decision, otherwise the "gap" between the intentional state and the action, requiring to be filled by a specific act, would never manifest itself, contrary to the facts. Pfänder's theory not only solves the problem, but helps us see why a motive is not a cause: a motive is causally inert without the endorsement of a subject. Were this not the case, determinism would be true. Now determinism is (maybe) compatible with free will (in a very week sense of the term "free will"), but certainly not with a principle of

alternative possibilities, according to which a person can choose between courses of actions intended to realize different values. Since there is no choice without evaluation, we actually need an account of choices and decisions, and one that makes room both for alternative courses of action and their different significance relative to a person's orders of value preference and priority. This is exactly what Pfänder phenomenology of willing and motivation provides.[59]

The next step is to note that the same essential relation subsists between will and evaluation: there is no will without evaluating possible motives, any more than there are colors without colored surfaces or faces without an expression (including inexpressiveness). When made explicit and expressed verbally, evaluation is called deliberation—but in most cases, it remains implicit. In any case, evaluation is a form of judgment: a judgment of value, which is indeed typically comparative, affirming an order of preference or priority among goods. Now, the evaluation can well be "blind," without evidence, crazed or somnambulant—to whatever degree of insensibility and thoughtlessness that apathy may encourage: and it is in this slumber of the heart and the senses that the past, tradition, charismatic authority, national or local identity (that is, the figures that are most often associated, in common parlance, with the notion of values) slip in. Or, worse still, you have a "conversion to reality": after all, the world belongs to whoever steals it for themselves. The arbitrariness of the will thrives in the blindness of evaluation.

This opens our eyes to the jumble of rhetoric and arbitrariness (moral and political) that is hidden in the opposition between "pessimism of reason" and "optimism of the will."[60] Antonio Gramsci, who made this opposition popular, was theoretically a (tempered) "historical materialist" and a practical idealist: but practical idealism without a cognitive foundation becomes nothing more than a form of voluntarism, just like any form of political realism. The loftier the original aspirations, the more tragic the outcomes. Camus' *The Rebel*—a work of great philosophical significance, largely underestimated—delved deeply into the tragedy of

[59] On the significance of Pfänder in contemporary philosophy of agency see De Monticelli 2021.

[60] The origin of this opposition, known through the writings of Antonio Gramsci, has been discovered to be rooted in Burkhardt and Nietzsche. Before them, a version of it appears in Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1866)—see Posani Loewenstein (2017, p. 138).

the "just" who attempted a revolution and ended up drowning in blood, from the Jacobins to the Bolsheviks. These are among the most frightening "metamorphoses" in modern historical memory (see Chap. 2).

The evidence for the judgment of value, in the last analysis, is not another judgment. It is a "mute" axiological fact that "satisfies" or "verifies" the judgment (or does not); a fact that is present to us, not in a purely symbolic way—such as when we talk about something we do not know—but in a full and insightful (or "intuitive") way, such as when we talk about something that is right before our eyes.

Most philosophers today agree that value judgments are somehow tied to emotions, and this at a moment when research on emotions is growing across the disciplines, from the philosophy of mind to moral and political philosophy. Earlier, we referred to Martha Nussbaum, among the bestselling philosophical authors on the topic, who has, among other things, returned to the Stoic theory of emotions as a type of "judgment." Now, whether we aim to put the emotions to good use, even in a political sense, as Nussbaum advises, or whether we want to free ourselves from them, as the Stoics preached, it would seem that neither Nussbaum nor the Stoics are taking the actual cognitive role of feeling seriously. For a phenomenologist, the education of feeling has nothing to do with cultivating "positive" and shared sentiments and passions that will sustain "a good public political culture" (this, if anything, would be the job of the rhetorician)—it is instead a matter of freeing the receptive component of sensibility from all impediments to its exercise. However fallible, a receptive component can—like sensory perception, like any other mode of consciousness—be critically examined and is subject to verification of its reliability (see Sect. 4-5 in Chap. 2).

However, most philosophers still do not recognize that affective sensibility has a genuinely cognitive role—that its role is to value judgments what sense perception is to judgments of fact—and that there are essential and normative correlations between axiological content and lived experience in the emotive sphere. There would be much more to say on the "epistemology" of values, or rather on the theory of axiological verification,[61] but for now, we will invite the reader to proceed on their own behalf, exercising their own sensibility to values whenever they can.

[61] For an introduction to the phenomenology of feeling as axiological cognition see De Monticelli (2020a).

There are, however, a couple of issues that we cannot avoid. From our perspective, the cognition of value is undoubtedly the foundation of ethics, but if it is true that there are many values and diverse spheres of value (Sect. 4 in Chap. 3), how are we to characterize the specifically moral sphere? Moreover, if it is true that there are also many and diverse rankings of priority and preference of values, how can we maintain that pluralism does not entail ethical relativism?

The first issue concerns the relationship between axiology and ethics. It is vexing to see the general (the good, value) and the special (moral value) so confusingly intertwined in Moore's writings and those of his successors. However, even in Moore, we can sense the breadth of the axiological universe, as we do in the work of Brentano, the master of phenomenologists:

> The province of the highest practical good embraces everything which is subject to our rational operation in so far as a good can be realized in such matter. Not merely the self but also the family, the town, the state, the whole present world of life, even distant future times, may here be taken into account. All this follows from the principle of the summation of the good. To promote as far as possible the good throughout this great whole, that is manifestly the right end in life, towards which every act is to be ordered; that is the one, the highest command upon which all the rest depend.[62]

"This great whole"—this seems to be Brentano's phrase for the life-world that constructivists seem to ignore when trying to build universally acceptable formal procedures of validation for normative principles, whether they concern the just society or the just person. To this purpose, they must strip people of all aspects of their particularity—their origins, roots, social position, culture, interests—to come up with the moral person (pulled out of context), the subject willing to put him or herself in anyone else's place and, from this universalistic perspective, construct principles of justice anyone could accept, as Rawls tried to do.

[62] Brentano (1902, p. 28).

Where the "matter" or content of these principles comes from remains a mystery. However, there is no mystery for phenomenologists, for whom norms—all norms—are founded on values and their "matter." By "material" values, we mean what, in the current metaethical literature, are called "thick" values, such as courage or elegance, as opposed to "thin" values, such as good or right. As is well known, thick concepts seem to escape the fact/value dichotomy and can be used to challenge Hume's claim that one cannot derive an ought from an is. If, for example, being clear is a teacher's professional quality, then a teacher ought to be clear. Or, in terms of truth makers, there is a quality rich in descriptive content—clarity—which makes an "is" value statement true or false: Jack is clear (contingently true or false), or "a good teacher is clear" (a necessary axiological truth).[63]

The standard move in contemporary metaethics is to split a thick concept into two parts: a descriptive content and a normative operator, where the descriptive content is and has to be a purely "factual" or "natural" content. Value concepts have no axiological contents. They are thin, just prescriptions, or thick, and all the content they have is factual. This is a rewording of the dilemma of metaethics. It is, in fact, a consequence of Moore's thesis of irreducibility. No matter how a thick value concept is analyzed in factual terms, there will be a residual thin value carrying normativity—such as the goodness of being brave—that resists analysis in non-axiological terms, or else you will run into a naturalistic fallacy.[64]

"Material" axiology and "material" ethics are born out of a rejection of this "no-matter-of-value thesis." Thick concepts do have an axiological

[63] Hans Kelsen in his posthumous *General Theory of Norms* discussed the same issue with reference to Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (Kelsen 1991, ch. 52, "The 'theoretical content' of norms according to Husserl". Reference is to Husserl (2001), *Prolegomena*, §§14–16, where an ought statement is easily derived from an is statement containing a thick or "material" value term). From a phenomenological point of view (strongly opposed by Kelsen) thick value concepts are just concepts of material values, in which norms are grounded. For an analogous controversy which opposed Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch to Richard Hare's prescriptivism in the 1950s, see Putnam (2004).

[64] "The clearest account, as so often, is given by Hare: a term of this kind involves a descriptive complex to which a prescription has been attached, expressive of the values of the individual or of the society. […] It is essential to this account that the specific or "thick" character of these terms is given in the descriptive element. The value part is expressed, under analysis, by the all-purpose prescriptive term *ought*." Williams (1985, p. 130).

descriptive content, and there is a matter of value. This is the central claim of phenomenological axiology.

But how are we to orient ourselves *ethically* in the "great whole" where (as we have seen) we find values of every type and every level? "Where" are we to find the values of the moral sphere? This is a question that dissolves when we reflect on daily axiological experiences. First of all, only will and dispositions of free agents—hence people and not other things in the world—can be morally good or bad.

Kant claimed that the only good thing in the world is the good will. This is a compact phrase with many layers of meaning. In one sense, it is undeniable: if for good we mean "morally" good, Kant is expressing part of the truth. It is not all the truth, because decisions depend on evaluations and the reliability of feeling; the justness of feeling, in turn, depends on a free, voluntary disposition: the attention of the mind and the heart. Thus, in the last analysis, a person is morally good insofar as she is capable of emotional wakefulness, not only insofar as she decides and acts.

Moreover, Kant is wrong if he implies that the will's goodness does not depend on the values it intends to realize. True enough: it does not depend on the specific *goods* aimed at: otherwise, consequentialism would be right. Neither Kant nor a phenomenologist would give up the moral value of moral intentions in favor of consequentialism. But the distinction between values and goods (our first thesis) is missing in Kant.

The will's moral value *does* depend on the values it intends to realize. This is where the "material" ethics of values begins to diverge from the constructivists' formal or procedural ethics. This gives us the first thesis of phenomenological *ethics*: the moral value of the will presupposes all the non-moral values of the things in the world, and in a precise sense, depends on them. If your life had no value, what would be wrong with suppressing it? If a property had no value, what would be wrong with stealing?

Material ethics preserves a deontological element of Kant's ethics: the will is not good or bad because of the goods (or the ends) it realizes but because of the intention that moves it. This anti-consequentialist element blocks the will in its slide towards conversion to reality, which is to compromise on duty matters. However, the goodness of an intention cannot be ascertained but through the values it aims at realizing.

What is it for the will to "conform to duty" in this frame? Here we come to the precise sense in which goodness of the will depends on the essential—that is to say, *a priori*—relationships that values have with each other. Let us assume we believe—with sufficient evidence, until proven otherwise—that the value of a good in a given situation is greater than that of another good. For example, that a child's safety is more important than my momentary comfort—the situation being that of the child who will drown if I don't dive in to save him despite the unpleasantness of the cold bath. We can formulate an evident judgment of this type as $V_1 > V_2$. As we can see, this judgment concerns a given situation here and now—that demands a decision right away. Nevertheless, in this case, there is an *a priori* justification. If there were none, there would be no absolute obligation (at least for anybody capable of swimming).

So, we can set forth the second thesis of phenomenological ethics: a person's will is just or morally good when it tends to realize the highest possible value accessible to that person in that situation, and it will be more or less good according to the comparative height of the value(s) realized.[65]

The significant points of this thesis are, on the one hand, that duty is dependent on value(s), but on the other, that it is anchored in the practical horizon defined by the given situation and the agent. On the one hand, this thesis underlines the moral significance of any even minor situation and action: a table that is nicely set is better than a sloppy one, an accurately prepared lesson is usually better than one that is thrown together at the last minute, and so on. What I should do is at each point and at each moment suggested by the world, as long as I maintain the attention required to discern particular demands and their greater or lesser importance.

On the other hand, being anchored to the here and now brings to light what is perhaps the newest aspect of material ethics: it is anchored to the individual person's limits and capabilities on the one side and his or her "vocation" on the other. The fundamental point here is that moral universalism not only does not exclude but actually seeks individuation of one's own duty. The fundamental ethical question is not the general

[65] Scheler (1973 [1916], pp. 26–27). For an outline of a phenomenological ontology of individuals and individual essences, see De Monticelli 2020d.

"what should I do?" but the very particular "which goods can I bring to the world?" I, myself, with all my limits that are in part the physical, biological, psychological aspects of how I function—and the aspects inherent in my birth accident: in this position, community, culture, at this moment of time and space. The fundamental ethical question is the inverse of the Kant–Rawls question—"What are the principles that anyone would accept?"—that asks for removing the moral subject from the contingencies and circumstances in which people are embodied and immersed, aiming at an impersonal point of view.

One might object that values (or rather, objective priorities in their rank) are at best reasons for action—but still not really *motivating*. Indeed, moral reasons are not necessarily motivating: otherwise, moral freedom and the difference between normativity and psychological causality would be lost. Nevertheless, an individualization of moral reasons that takes care of the talents, the hopes, the legitimate beliefs, the acceptable cultural customs of a given person, seems to go, if not all the way, at least a good stretch of the road toward motivation. Of course, this sort of moral particularism must be compatible with moral universalism: but it is, for the right thing to do for x is *in principle* cognitively accessible by any y *different* from x: so everybody agrees that the duties of a teacher are different from the ones of a student.

However, this individualization of moral reasons makes anybody's relationship to truth, especially of beliefs concerning oneself, even more crucial for ethics. Max Scheler, for this reason, wrote a treatise that can be read as expanding Socrates' precept: *The Idols of Self-Knowledge* (Scheler 1973a)—a far-reaching phenomenology of self-deception and self-illusion.

11 The Fox's Last Challenge: Pluralism

This brings us to the problem of pluralism and might even lead us to a solution. Moral philosophy has always studied the good life from two perspectives: the question of what is the good or happy life, and how to realize it—not necessarily in a hedonistic sense, but rather in the sense of the full flowering of each person's potential; and the question of living

well in the sense of the constraints on self-realization necessary to respect the right to self-realization of others. Aristotle applied the term "justice" to this second dimension of morality: justice is considered the "perfect" virtue in the sense that it completes the eudemonistic orientation of ancient ethics by adding the dimension of relations with others—and is considered "sovereign" among virtues because, in a certain way, it encompasses all the virtues.

If the hedgehog is right, there must be coherence and not conflict between a good life and a just life (this was, after all, the idea Socrates defended against Thrasymachus). In an ancient context—we can very well continue to use Aristotle as an example—reconciliation is made possible through a radical assumption that seems to us now to be erroneous: that the "common" good, the good of the city, overrides that of the individuals who are its citizens. *Pace* the supporters of ideas of community and destiny on the one hand, and the progeny of Hegel on the other, we have learned to "uproot" ourselves even from the ties we hold most dear if what is at stake is the examination of our reasons for action and belief or the critique of traditions (see Sect. 7 and 9 in Chap. 5). Most of us are terrified by the idea of *raison d'état*—among the most dangerous ideas the human mind has ever concocted, given that a state does not have a mind, does not think, and cannot see. Moreover, we cannot imagine what the supreme value of a state could be if not justice. That is, the organization of the state around principles, rules, procedures, and the division and distribution of powers that guarantee to each person not only the exercise of their rights, but also the removal of "those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person."[66]

The "common" good, therefore, does exist, but it is nothing other than justice: and the study of practical reason, normatively embodied in the post-war constitutions and declarations, gives us an idea of just how many values and goods make up the complex network of ideality—and its bonds—that "hold together" the house we all share. Actually, given that we have cited Article 3 of the Italian Constitution, we should note that our archetypal hedgehog, Ronald Dworkin, devotes a 300-plus page

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[66] Constitution of Italy, Article 3 (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Italy).

treatise to the possible ways, including economic ways, "to remove those obstacles": that is, to the political theory of equality. His purpose is to persuade the reader that each step towards equality is a step towards individual freedom in its most profoundly liberal sense. Freedom, that is, as a practical possibility that should not be denied to anyone, to make of one's life something that makes sense and has value, in short, to make it worth living (Sect. 6 in Chap. 4).

This is precisely the key to our problem. It is not just a question of fact, but a question of essence. It is not simply that our societies are pluralist, that is, that they host conceptions of the world and of the good that are different and often in disagreement or in conflict. Essentially, there is no other good life, no other possible "happiness," than that of the individual—in the same way that existential failure is individual; and each "possible happiness" is different from every other: it is a unique possibility that is not replicable and not repeatable. The countless wasted, humiliated, and lost lives that our societies (and those that are even worse) afford through inequality, wars, and migrations—were each one unique and unrepeatable, each encompassing an entire world. Nevertheless, those who were to live these lives were never allowed to fully "take them seriously." If there is one thing due to everybody, it is this: that each person should be able to take one's own life—which in the end is all each person has—seriously. For it is a life unlike any other.

The fox—not the relativist one, but the "tragic" one[67]—says: indeed. People take their lives seriously by living for some absolute value. People want to be "saved." There are forms of salvation and paradise that are harmless enough, but there are also forms—e.g. religions—that do not allow for individual (e.g. women's, LGBTQ's) emancipation and freedom. Referring to a distinction we borrowed from Jeanne Hersch (Sect. 7 in Chap. 4) we would say that those who have a credo of this second type do not just live "with a view to" absolute values but claim to act and speak in their name.[68]

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[67] Represented by such classics as Max Weber or Isaiah Berlin (see Sect. 3 in Chap. 4) and, more recently, Samuel Huntington.

[68] One can think of ISIS, of course, but also of the victims of US bombings in the Middle East, not to mention the innumerable victims of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However, this raises a problem for axiological pluralism. The tragic fox does not like relativism and simply limits himself to saying: *à la guerre comme à la guerre*. Here is his view: "We" accept pluralism as a fact, but "we" are the ones—at least in our house—who decide, the ones who make laws and impose them through the force of democracy. Democracy itself—the fox goes on—is a product of one of the religions in the conflict: the liberal ethos whose God rewards its followers with a sort of happiness that can range from "Calvinist" success to public utility to individual pleasure, but at least does not require slaughter for the non-believer.

According to the tragic fox, then, "pluralism" means that might makes right: he defends a statistical or majoritarian conception of democracy, in which ideality provides no constraints.[69]

However, the tragic fox's position lacks consistency because it provides no reasons to counter the self-suppression of democracy—even though it considers democracy as an essential part of its ethos. This type of fox does not recognize any universally binding constraints on its own ethos that can give a reason to counter conversion to the power of the winning reality. It lives in the realm of metamorphoses: it is a fox that resembles a wolf.

Then, along comes the hermeneutic fox who says: religions in conflict represent the different cultures that history has fostered, and there is no way to be human without getting caught up in the language of one's own time and one's own culture. Globalization simply causes different times to merge—from archaic to postmodern. Each culture places values in a different ranking, and "our" culture no longer places anything in any ranking. Everything is allowed, including changing one's ethos at will. So, the hermeneutic fox, too, lives in a realm of metamorphosis but veers towards the moth. He says: if you believe that there are objective truths, you end up suppressing pluralism. Pluralism entails relativism. This is the hermeneutic fox's creed.

How does the hedgehog respond? Its ethical and political reasons are in harmony. Justice as a moral virtue (the value of the just will) can do precious little in this world without justice as a political value. Ethics concerns individuals' wills and actions and indeed also of individuals as

[69] Dworkin (2011).

citizens: but there are injustices that no one, in particular, is responsible for—caused by actions that result from life in connection to others—and that define the obligations of a republic. Society, as it should be, would not produce so much injustice. However, in the end, society, as it should be, is literally in the hands of its citizens. Therefore, in the last analysis, ethics plays a decisive role. The just society as ideally outlined in the post-war normative documents also involves, as we have seen, a model for democracy that is different from that of the foxes, which is devoid of ideal constraints: Dworkin calls it a "partnership conception" of democracy, opposing it to the "majoritarian or statistical conception."[70]

If the foxes (all of them, tragic and hermeneutic) were right, this idea of democracy would simply be an expression of one ethos among others. So, what exactly is an ethos? Material axiology gives us a precise definition: it is an order of priority of values that corresponds to a possible ideal of the good, "happy," fully human life. To the extent that an ethos represents an ideal type of good life, it exists nowhere other than embodied in the life of individuals, in their ambitions and endeavors. And it manifests itself, wherever there is a personal feeling, precisely as a felt ranking of goods or ills, according to their comparative importance.

Not only does the "great whole" strike us with the wide range of its axiological horizons, with the abundance of goods that it contains and the variety of evils with which it threatens us, it also impacts us with the rank or, if we prefer, the relative depth of values. Thus, there is a correlation between the importance that a value seems to us to have and how "profoundly" or "intimately" it impacts us. This is not meant metaphorically: there is a precise individual metric of depth. A value seems to us to be more or less important in proportion to how deeply it strikes us, and its power to motivate us, orient our choices, and ultimately become a

[70] "But there is another supposed conflict among our political values. This is the conflict between equality and liberty, on the one hand, and the right to participate as an equal in one's own governance, on the other […] I respond to that claim of conflict by distinguishing various conceptions of democracy. I distinguish a majoritarian or statistical conception from what I call the partnership conception. The latter holds that in a genuinely democratic community each citizen participates as an equal partner, which means more than just that he has an equal vote. It means that he has an equal voice and an equal stake in the result. On that conception, which I defend, democracy itself requires the protection of just those individual rights to justice and liberty that democracy is sometimes said to threaten" (Dworkin 2011, p. 5).

substantive part of our lives—varies proportionately. The joy of understanding Plato motivates me more than the pleasure of eating ice cream—but for another, the piano may take Plato's place, or the great mountains, children, a business endeavor, politics, or all of these in different orders of priority.

We are quite capable of distinguishing orders of preference from orders of priority of values. Tonight, I may prefer trash TV to René Clair's film, but I cannot help feeling a little guilty about it. In the drowning child scenario, axiological priority cannot be confused with preference. If a government in power confuses the rule of law with the rule by law (by arbitrarily modifying the constitution), this cannot be considered an expression of a legitimate preference—because it does not respect an objective axiological priority.

> Whether I am investigating the innermost essence of an individual, a historical era, a family, a people, a nation, or any other socio-historical group, I will know and understand it most profoundly when I have discerned the system of its concrete value-assessments and value-preference, whatever organization this system has. I call this system the ethos of any such subject.[71]

Max Scheler wrote this about 1916. Dworkin calls objective orders of priority "critical interests" and distinguishes them from simple preferences or "volitional interests." However shared and "collective" an ethos may be, the important point is that it purports to correspond to the individual's ideal of a good life: identifying their role in life and making them able to take it seriously. Besides—and this point suggests how we can respond to the foxes—the more seriously a person can take her life, the more responsible for it she recognizes herself to be, the better she will understand her own possibilities. These have little to do with her will's arbitrariness and much more with the truth of her self-knowledge. As there are aspects of value that have been brought to light by one particular civilization, thus there are goods that only you can bring into the world—and there is no general "happiness" where the good that only you can bring does not also matter to others. How much poorer would

[71] Scheler (1973a, p. 98).

humanity have been if Einstein had opted to play violin or if Mozart had preferred physics instead? Yet, each human life is subject to this tragic error of self-misunderstanding.

To sum up: an ethos is a ranking of values that corresponds to a personal identity—which can (but only in part) also be a "cultural" identity. An ethos is constitutive of one's moral identity. It follows that a human being is a moral subject in his or her unrepeatable uniqueness—and not as a representative of anyone else. One is a person in a moral sense because of one's own unique order of priorities—and having an order of priorities provides the foundation of one's very dignity.

Therefore, with all due respect to Kant and Rawls, an agent is a moral person, not only to the extent that he can act based on reasons independent of desires (moral reasons) but to the extent that these reasons are embedded in his singular moral identity. A large part of our duty is strictly individual, tied after all to age, situations, roles, professions—and to "vocations." Some duties are not universal, but rather specific and personal.

The hedgehog recognizes the variety of human talents—portrayed in Plato's *Phaedrus* with the grand image of the souls' processions, following the different gods in their celestial journeys before birth. But the hedgehog also recognizes that if there is one thing that we owe to each other, it is the freedom to take one's life seriously, based on the personal axiological ranking that can allow the person to flourish. Ethics is what is due to everybody: the universal part of our obligations. The hedgehog's response to relativism distinguishes between ethos and ethics, between the diverse orders of good lives and the just life norm. This distinction also brings unity: what is it that can "hold together" the many orders of a plural society, if not justice—which represents the ethical minimum, the condition for recognition of the seriousness and dignity of each life?

Of course, this means that it is not true that everything is permitted, as the wolf and the moth contend. No ethos that violates justice is permitted. Respect and equal consideration for each ethically compatible ethos are required. Relativism amounts to confusing ethics with a particular ethos.

12 Final Thoughts

In this chapter on axiology, the word we have returned to most often is *bonds*: in other words, the constraints that, if dissolved, turn everything back into dust. In short, the limits to our destructive arbitrariness. Eidetical constraints are placed on imagination, eidetical and axiological constraints are placed on action, particularly on just action. Kant found people's freedom to reside in their capacity to give themselves obligations or laws. We tried to argue that we are not the ones who "pose" or "impose" constraints: they are already there to be discovered. We are always free to ignore them as well as transgress them. But to ignore them is the first fault.

Let us return to Pascal's question for the last time. Why is it so irritating when someone mangles logic? Our very language—which makes us human, opening before us the infinite expanses of what is thinkable and what is knowable—represents a unique set of bonds: grammatical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. Here arbitrariness immediately reveals its idiotic side. Every violation of bonds results in a destruction of meaning. It is no accident that the corruption of language is even worse than the corruption of laws in damaging a country's moral and civic life.

Phenomenologists have shown that there are analogous bonds on possible (co)variation for every set of contents given to some mode of insight or direct cognition: from Gestalt organization of perceptual data to the eidetic and axiological invariants organizing the varieties of things and goods, to the structures of pure ideality, logic, and ethics. These constraints are never something we orchestrate or "establish." They are given, found. The discovery of the gift of bonds is among the greatest legacies of philosophical thought in the last century: it has barely even begun to demonstrate its potential to repair the major cracks in our conception of reality—what academic philosophy refers to as "ontology." The job of future philosophical thought is to illustrate the effects of this gift in every field. Or such is the suggestion I put forward in this book.

However, it is in the field of the intuitive foundations of practical reason—the field of our everyday experience of value and disvalue—that this work can and must begin right away where it is most urgent. This is the field of material ethics. This term used by the classics of

phenomenology signals a kind of bond to life and its seriousness that philosophy must not be allowed to break—lest we end up losing track of the meaning of the enterprise and, in many cases, of the words we use. The philosopher's greatest temptation is indeed to break this constraint. Today, I think that precisely the awareness of this bond and this prohibition defines phenomenology and distinguishes it from most other currents and philosophical thought methods. In this discovery of the gift of the "bonds" that tie together and bind the meaning of our statements to the matter of fact and value we experience, I see the turning point that could allow philosophical research, in the age of science, to avoid becoming mere banality or just ideology. It could help it resist the risk of losing cognitive ambition and ethical, legal, and political importance, which threatens it more and more—so that, perhaps, philosophy has already been marginalized in the contemporary intellectual realm, with consequences that can only be considered inauspicious.

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